Love & marriage or not: three stories

COMMONWEAL

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KEVIN KELLY on airline regulation

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CORRESPONDENCE

Superb issue

Philadelphia, Pa.

To the Editors: I am an Anglican priest, now retired, and a longtime subscriber to *Commonweal.* It has always been an excellent publication, but I cannot recall any other issue as superb as that of May 21. Although every article, including the book reviews, is great, I was particularly impressed by Robert Hoyt's insightful response to David R. Carlin's April 9 column on gay people in military service, and by Edward Gaffney's brilliant assessment of the Waco tragedy. Many thanks!

(REV.) MICHAEL R. BECKER

Carlin on Hoyt

Newport, R.I.

To the Editors: Some instinct tells me that anyone who writes about gay rights more than twice in a nine-month period is a crank. Well, I used up my quota before the end of February (and that's not even counting my responses to letters to the editor). But here I go again, risking crankdom status by responding to the critique of my views in Robert Hoyt's "Editor's Notebook" of May 21 ("Is It Ideology?").

The difficulty I have in answering Hoyt is that there is little in his remarks I disagree with. For instance, he summarizes his case by saying: "First, not all gay supporters of gay rights are apostles of normlessness. Second, not all opponents of gay rights are moved by high-minded concern for marriage and the family." I agree completely. And when I read the elaboration of those two points, which comprises the heart of his essay, I continue to nod in agreement.

Despite this, Hoyt is correct in sensing that he and I have a basic disagreement on the gay-rights issue. It is a disagreement not so much at the level of facts as at the level of interpretation. I suspect the clue to why these interpretations conflict was provided by Hoyt when he said that his "besetting ideological temptation....is not so much liberalism as utopianism...."

Now I won't go so far as to deny that I am myself a utopian. After all, Americans are utopians by nature, and I'm a good American. But Bob Hoyt says he flavors his utopianism with "spices from the Sermon on the Mount." Dear me! That's like flavoring curry with hot peppers. For my part, I flavor my natural American utopianism (which, I suspect, is ultimately derived from the Sermon on the Mount anyway) with the spice of pessimism, i.e., with liberal doses of skepticism about the inevitable progress of the human race. My preferred scripture on this topic is the parable of the wheat and the tares. Good and evil flourish in the world together; things are always getting better and worse at the same time.

It is one of the merits of Hoyt's essay that he recognizes that homosexual marriage is the fundamental question at issue. Now, such marriage, considered in abstraction from the rest of social reality, may be in itself a good thing. But the trouble is, it cannot exist apart from the rest of reality. The English philosopher Isaiah Berlin has pointed out that many genuine goods are ultimately incompatible with one another; consequently not all good things can be maximized simultaneously. To permit homosexual marriage would be to alter the nature of the institution of marriage, perhaps the most significant alteration since the shift from polygamy to monogamy. At best, this shift is incompatible with keeping the focus of marriage on the upbringing of children, a focus that has already grown fuzzy in recent times; at worst, it will completely derange relations between the sexes. At all events, it is a vast, unexplored territory, where, for all we know, fierce monsters dwell. Only utopians or rationalists (in the pejorative sense of that term) would care to rush in.

Then consider Act-Up, the radical gay rights group among whose claims to fame has been its desecration of the Mass at Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York. Hoyt is far from condoning such outrageous conduct, but he says it is "the predictable (which doesn't mean forgivable) consequence of pariahhood." In other words, the sins of Act-Up are at least in part the sins of society; stop treating gays as pariahs, and Act-Up will wither away. Query: if this is so, why has Act-Up surfaced at precisely the moment in American history when gay pariahhood has diminished almost to the vanishing point? When homosexuals were truly pariahs, no such ill-mannered organization manifested itself. But now that gays are at least as respectable as Protestant Evangelicals, and probably more so, April 25 viewers of C-Span discovered a leading spokesman for Act-Up "outing" a member of President Clinton's cabinet at the gay rights march in Washington. Where is pariahhood when we really need it?

(Continued on page 29)

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COMMONWEAL

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That sinking feeling

As the past twelve years made clear, we have one president and our fortunes are tied to him. Twelve years of Reagan-Bush proved enough of borrow-and-spend for a majority of Americans. Last November, ousting a sitting president, the country voted convincingly for change. It is true that the electorate as a whole was less than enthusiastic about electing Bill Clinton (he gained only 43 percent of the popular vote), but his supporters and others hoped that his intelligence, political acumen, and youthful energy—coupled with a Democratic majority in both the House and the Senate—would set a different tone and inaugurate a new national course. So far, they have been sadly disappointed.

When Bill Clinton was voted out of office after his first term as governor of Arkansas, he regrouped, reclaimed the governor's mansion two years later, and successfully ran the state of Arkansas for the next ten years. He will not have that luxury as president. Either he regroups now or he will pay the price—as most assuredly will the country that turned to him to renew its vision and reverse its fortunes.

In his State of the Union address this past February, President Clinton's concrete proposals for trimming the deficit were heard by a country unusually open and ready to accept sacrifice—as long as it was equitably shared by all—as a means of putting its economic house in order. A remarkable window of opportunity seemed to coincide with the arrival of a president willing to address the country frankly and to challenge the Congress to end years of gridlock. The deficit would be cut by $325 billion over four years, and if others could come up with greater savings, the administration would be willing to consider them: "We need you to hold our feet to the fire," Clinton told an audience in Saint Louis the following day. "No raising taxes unless we cut spending."

Those were heady days, followed too soon by a season of disillusion. Clinton may have called for sacrifice, but even with his proposal, the deficit is still slated to be $212 billion four years from now, and then to increase, as David Broder notes (*Washington Post National Weekly*, May 3-9). The job-stimulus package the president proposed as a needed jolt to the economy was painted as a pork-barrel pay-back to Democratic mayors. Republicans in the Senate successfully filibustered the bill and the president lost valuable political momentum. Then there were the president's self-inflicted wounds: White House confusions, presidential backtrackings, and an onslaught of negative, piranha-like criticism from the press and Mr. Perot. By the time the president went for a walk with his daughter following his ill-fated haircut on a Los Angeles runway and bought a copy of Scott Turow's *Pleading Guilty*, the country was feeling he ought to do some soul-searching and make some public declarations of failure himself.

Then, briefly, the president seemed to regain some of his momentum. His address at the Vietnam War Memorial on Memorial Day was brief, courageous, and heal-

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ing; his remarks on gays in the military and on abortion funding in a Rose Garden town meeting were more temperate and politically sensitive than in the recent past; his budget proposal, a potential presidency-breaker if it failed, passed the House by a whisker; and his appointment of David R. Gergen as White House counsel indicated an effort to regroup and regain the center. But then, like a roller coaster plunging after a momentary climb, the president reversed himself on the Lani Guinier nomination—claiming, rightly, that some of her views on civil rights ran "completely counter to all my ideas about a single society"—and voters in Texas sent a Republican to fill Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen's Senate seat.

It is time for President Clinton to show that he still knows the lessons of his first defeat in Arkansas, and to convince the American people that he takes the art of governing seriously. If the Guinier affair, which cost him personally and politically, helps Clinton finally to clarify his "center," it will be a lesson well learned. To straighten out the economic affairs of the country will take courage, vision, and endurance. That is what Clinton was elected to do, and he and the Democratic Congress have got to get on with it. The public remains supportive of change, and despite its growing doubts about the president's performance, is willing to give him a chance. According to a June 6 *New York Times* poll, 69 percent of those asked said that the president was learning from his problems and felt he had a viable vision of where to lead the country. There may be a sense among some voters that though Mr. Clinton has fumbled too often, the media have been guilty of piling on.

The Clinton "vision" will be put to a rigorous test when the Senate votes on the budget. The president's package as approved by the House will require significant compromises to pass the Senate. The administration's vaunted BTU-energy tax, meant to alter the nation's consciousness about energy consumption as well as to raise needed revenue, has become a nightmare of loopholes and regulations. Now in the process of being whittled back, it will be lucky to raise a fraction of the intended revenues and may turn people against energy conservation out of sheer antipathy toward bureaucratic knotmaking.

All the more reason for Mr. Clinton to refocus his political priorities, to impose greater self-discipline, and to declare precisely where his "political center" lies. If not, the American people will eventually throw up their hands, Republicans will feel no imperative to work with the president, and the country will be the loser. A shaky four months is bad. Four years of the same would be a disaster.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For over a year now, we have been printing a column, "An Editor's Notebook," written and signed by a member of the editorial staff. Our purpose: to break from the anonymity of editorial writing and permit the expression of personal views on a variety of matters. Some readers have taken these columns to represent the editorial position of *Commonweal*. They do not, and in order to underline this distinction, we are changing the title to "Notebook." Hope that's clear! Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

NOTEBOOK

THE VIRTUES OF SARAJEVO

REFLECTIONS OF A CITY DWELLER

Most of my adult life I have believed that the last "good" war was World War II, which, of course, didn't end well. The firebombing of Dresden and Tokyo and the dropping of A-bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki very clearly did not meet the just-war criteria I assiduously studied as a junior in college (though our ethics professor very definitely thought otherwise). Vietnam was the war of my young adulthood. By 1964, it was clear—to me anyway—that it violated all the just-war principles so carefully laid out in that ethics class. Ditto American adventures in the Dominican Republic, Central America, and more recently Grenada and Panama.

So why? Why? I keep asking myself do I see Bosnia so differently? And before that, to some extent, Kuwait? I am still not sure. In trying to decide, painfully, fallibly, whether any given resort to armed force is morally prohibited or called for, we sift through many factors, from geopolitical considerations to complicated calculations about available means and likely consequences. Much in this process is unavoidably subjective (which is true, of course, about most of life's important decisions). Historical memories and associations—ethnic cleansing and the Holocaust, for example—play an important part. And though the just-war calculus may ultimately prove negative on U.S. action in the Gulf and potential action in Bosnia, I have been reflecting about one of those more elusive elements that contributed to my hesitant agreement that the effort to liberate Kuwait was justified and to my stronger conviction that our failure to relieve the Bosnians and the siege of their cities is not.

My conviction rests, in part, on the fact that both wars were (are) wars against civilians and more specifically against cities. The Iraqis and the Serbs did not primarily engage their foes on the military plane, but launched and continued their aggression respectively against civilians in Kuwait City and in Bosnian cities, especially Sarajevo.

In addition to watching the Serbs' unrelenting attacks against civilians (last year in the walled city of Dubrovnik, this year in Sarajevo), perhaps my passion on this matter is part of a deep-seated belief that cities and city dwellers are not only particularly vulnerable to the kind of no-holds-barred warfare the Serbs practice and to the terror that goes with it, but that cities and city dwellers are the very places where tolerance and acceptance, albeit sometimes begrudging acceptance, of "strangers," of "others," are practiced in ordinary and everyday ways—ways that become available to a whole society when they are needed.

Sarajevo itself seemed such a place to me. In 1968 with a group of students from France, I stood on the spot where a Serb,

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Gavrilo Princip, shot Archduke Ferdinand on June 28, 1914, an act that precipitated World War I. The guide referred to Princip as a "patriot." When the information was repeated by one French student to a less attentive member of our group, Princip was referred to as an "assassin," and finally another student, of a very conservative cast, retold the tale using the word "terrorist." Three words, three versions of Princip's motives. We students were reminded that history is complex and not easily settled as to cause or consequence. But in 1968, we could reflect on and discuss all of those interpretations peacefully and with a sense of irony at our experience of "living history," all the while admiring the city's charm and its urbane attitude toward this past. It was in Sarajevo, I realize, that for the first time I woke to the sound of the muezzin's call to morning prayer.

To destroy Sarajevo, its citizens, and their way of life is to destroy the very means upon which negotiation, accommodations, and ultimately peace can be reached among the tribes and warring factions of the former Yugoslavia.

Those means include the everyday civilities that make life possible among city dwellers; for example, the New Yorkers I see every day—the ones that don't make the headlines—holding doors open; giving way in pedestrian gridlock; maintaining a flower garden in the park for the enjoyment of the neighborhood; carrying a pregnant woman down the fire stairs at the World Trade Center; taking the extra half-step to placate, to accommodate, to negotiate the irritations, the confrontations, the injustices—small and large—of public life. And of course, civic life includes the more elaborate political, social, and physical infrastructures that keep a city humming. Destroying cities and city dwellers destroys all this.

Sarajevo reminds us that New York or Chicago or San Francisco could be in similar straits. The siege of Sarajevo reminds me, a city dweller, how siege and snipers, how hauling water and foraging for food, how death and privation would shift the physical and spiritual landscape of my everyday life. (Certainly one of the most disturbing and contested points of American policy remains the degree to which Iraqi civilians were subjected to death and disease by the bombing of bridges, electrical grids, and other infrastructure in Baghdad, seemingly for military purposes but with significant collateral damage.)

Sarajevo under siege shows how fragile our civilities are even in the presence of great personal courage. Under sniper fire, the Sarajevo zoo keeper fed the animals until the last bear died. A cello player defied the mayhem and the snipers by performing daily in a public square. Nurses and doctors work to stem the flow of blood, but they cannot stop the shells and the bullets. These are people who have lived for generations, sharing a city and a form of life that are being torn from their mooring, from the civilities of everyday life by the demons of tribalism and nationalism.

However history finally weighs the morality of the war against Iraq, the liberation of the citizens of Kuwait City ought to weigh heavily in passing judgment on our decision to go to war. The continuing international failure to end the siege of Sarajevo and other cities and towns in Bosnia-Herzegovina should weigh on the consciences of all those who continue to argue against military intervention.

MARGARET O'BRIEN STEINFELS

In keeping with *Commonweal*'s usual schedule, only one issue is published each month during July and August. The next issue will be dated July 16.

The why of it

People have often asked why Michael and I had nine children. Basically, we wanted a large family, and over the years, we had some difficulty defining "large."

After our first three boys were born, people greeted us with the appropriate "oohs" and "ahs" and seemed to feel that we had fulfilled our duty to God, country, and society-at-large.

When our fourth pregnancy was announced, there was some consternation, but most people adopted the "they're trying for a girl" attitude. In fact, she was born, and these same people slapped us on the back with a "Good job!" and presumably returned to their lawns, dishes, and laundry feeling the world was once again safe from our procreative talents. The remark most frequently heard at this time was: "Now you've had your girl!" (Michael and I were unaware that there was a quota.)

Bewilderment set in because we weren't at all sure that we were finished, so a somewhat longer time elapsed before announcing the fact that we were expecting No. 5. At this time and on through the births of Nos. 6 and 7, friends, neighbors, and family expressed a mix of dismay, regret, and antagonism. Some were mute, and others uttered a singular, "Why?" Michael and I weathered these reactions with some chagrin, still somewhat confused as to why our family size was a matter of such pressing concern. (By now, the older children were aware of some attention. A visit to the local McDonald's produced pointed inquiries and many stares; the children began to ask, "Why?")

With the advent of No. 8, some folks seemed numb while others degenerated into subtle avoidance. However, a very curious phenomenon developed when our ninth and final child was born: people suddenly became hysterical with side-splitting laughter as they counted our progeny.

And there lies the real reason Michael and I had nine children—to make people happy. GAIL M. LAWLOR

Gail M. Lawlor is a free-lance writer from Wantage, New Jersey.

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REPORT FROM ALOFT

MIDFLIGHT CORRECTION?

REREGULATION WON'T WORK

During the late 1970s the Carter administration deregulated one industry after another. Businesses as diverse as airlines, trucking companies, and financial institutions had the wraps taken off. The rationale: Market forces would increase competition, providing a boon to consumers, who would benefit from a greater variety of services at lower prices. The Reagan administration took a more subtle approach to deregulation. It focused on rolling back federal safety and pollution laws, regulations that had driven up the cost of doing business. The Bush administration's Council on Competitiveness, which loosened federal laws by fiat, proved the apex of this approach.

Now the Clinton administration is charting a far different course. Undoubtedly President Bill Clinton's coming health-care reform legislation will involve some regulation of costs. Elsewhere, the new government has committed itself to stiffer enforcement of health, safety, and environmental laws. The Council on Competitiveness, industry's regulation-buster, has been disbanded.

But the Clinton administration is also considering whether to reverse the deregulatory tide unleashed by the last Democratic president. And it's beginning with the airline industry. In late April, Clinton appointed a committee, the National Commission to Ensure a Strong Competitive Airline Industry, to study whether the nation's beleaguered air carriers could benefit from a healthy dose of government authority. It began deliberations on May 24.

Certainly the industry looks like a good candidate. Crazy fare wars, including last summer's half-price bloodletting, have bashed profits. Skyrocketing costs, including high wages and hefty debt payments racked up because of overambitious growth plans, have driven losses up further. All told, the industry has lost $10 billion since 1989. Most of the airlines that started up after deregulation in 1978 are now out of business. Three of the nation's twelve largest carriers have failed, including the one-time national flagship, Pan Am. And the madness continues: During the first quarter of 1993, the airlines lost another $1 billion.

So it's no wonder that the Clinton administration formed a commission to figure out whether the federal government can help the industry. With unemployment proving an especially stubborn foe, the administration worries that a continuing bloodletting in the airline industry will swell the jobless ranks further. Already the industry has shed 100,000 jobs, including employees laid off by aircraft manufacturers like Boeing. Moreover, the federal government fears U.S. carriers may soon be too weak to fend off strong foreign competitors like British Airways.

Even given these fears, there's only one truth anyone can say about the industry: Reregulation isn't the answer. Putting aside the Gulf War, which drove up fuel prices in 1991, almost all of the industry's wounds have been self-inflicted. If the Clinton administration takes action before the carriers heal themselves, it will only preserve a money-losing structure that consumers will pay for through higher fares. If the government intervenes it could invite the worst of all outcomes: direct taxpayer subsidies.

The new commission is likely to hear many arguments favoring reregulation, and much, much more. Already the industry's leading labor unions, the Air Line Pilots Association and the International Association of Machinists, have proposed the reinvention of something akin to the Civil Aviation Board, the agency that once regulated fares. From the unions' perspective, the carriers, slaves to fare wars, need to have somebody else do their pricing for them. The airlines, of course, disagree. Instead, the industry's Big Three—United, Delta, and American—want the 10 percent federal ticket tax rolled back, which they argue discourages travel. They also want limits placed on how long a carrier can remain in bankruptcy, since they believe the bankrupt airlines are responsible for most fare wars. The insolvent carriers oppose any revision of the bankruptcy code. Instead, they want the government to turn the ticket tax over to the airlines as a de facto subsidy. Another industry executive has suggested the federal government provide loan guarantees for new aircraft purchases. Taxpayers would pick up the tab if a carrier failed.

What's wrong with these options? Plenty. Regulation was relatively easy when carriers simply shuttled passengers from point A to point B, say Pittsburgh to Saint Louis. But these days, with airlines ferrying passengers through complex "hub and spoke" systems that funnel the Saint Louis-bound traveler through a hub in Chicago, it's nearly impossible to establish fares that are equitable and competitive.

The Clinton administration must also consider that consumers would be the first losers if fares were regulated. Though 1993 fares are higher than 1992's, today's deeply discounted tickets for leisure travelers are below 1978 levels. And a raft of low-cost new entrants, including Reno Air and Kiwi International, continue to keep fares affordable on heavily traveled routes, like Chicago to Newark/New York. Then there's Southwest Airlines, whose average fares are one-quarter lower than those of rivals like United. Since most major carriers can't make money at Southwest prices, the federal government would have to demand the carrier raise its fares. Such action is extremely unlikely, to say the least.

Worse yet, the world is watching every move. And if the Clinton administration reimposes government controls, foreign governments will use the reversal to impose even tighter controls over their own markets—markets the U.S. desperately wants to liberalize.

Currently, the Department of Transportation is locked in tough negotiations in Europe and Japan, seeking to lift government

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restrictions on competition. If the U.S. succeeds, American carriers would gain enormous advantages because they have cost structures two to three times lower than their overseas rivals. If U.S. airlines were allowed to cut fares and expand service in Europe, they'd have a huge advantage. But reregulation would free foreign governments to resist any pressure to open their markets.

More importantly, these options overlook the fact that only the carriers can solve problems they caused. Is overcapacity the government's fault? No, for that the Big Three have only themselves to blame. Over the last few years United, Delta, and American went on an aircraft buying binge. They bought over 445 aircraft to expand their fleets by up to 43 percent each. The carriers bet passengers would continue to crowd onto planes, despite an economic downturn. The carriers also believed that as bankrupt airlines went out of business, they'd take over the abandoned routes. When the recession drove passengers off planes and the insolvent carriers didn't go out of business, the Big Three were forced to cut prices to fill their shiny new jets. And fill them they must. Lease payments on new aircraft can run well over $200,000 a month.

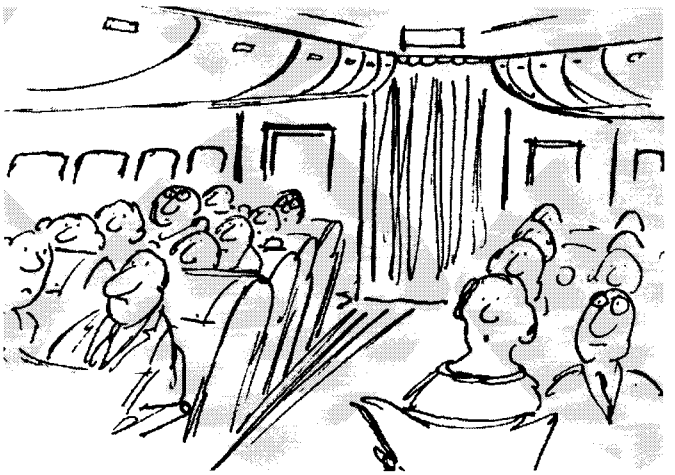
Carriers were busy expanding on the ground, as well. Several airlines developed their "hub-and-spoke" systems beyond all economic sense. While hubs may be big money-makers in large destination markets like Chicago, New York, and Dallas, a host of hubs in smaller cities like San Jose and Nashville cost the industry dearly. Once again, the government can't close money-losing hubs. Indeed, it's a problem the carriers are already tackling. American, for instance, has pared back operations in San Jose and may close its hub in Raleigh/Durham.

That leaves the thorniest problem: Labor. Salaries and benefits eat up 40 percent of an airline's revenue. Tough work rules, akin to those that hamstrung the auto industry during the 1970s, sharply constrict productivity. Recently United asked its unions for a 5 percent one-year wage cut and a 10 percent increase in productivity, which would require changes in work rules. So far, United has been rebuffed.

It's no wonder. Horrible labor relations have bedeviled the industry for years. Overall, airline management hasn't worked hard to earn labor's trust. Unions are barely tolerated; they aren't brought in as partners, and they learn about key decisions the way the rest of us do—in the newspapers. Unions remain unconvinced that carriers would use any sign of weakness to demand steeper and steeper cuts. The lack of dialogue clearly hampers any meaningful changes.

But that's something a government commission can do little about. There is an alternative out there for the airlines to learn from: Southwest. That carrier pays high wages in return for more liberal work rules. A Southwest pilot, for instance, puts in 30 percent more flying time than an average pilot at United, but earns only slightly less. And management, led by chief executive Herb Kelleher, has forged a strong relationship with its unions.

Finally, anything that smells like a taxpayer bailout is politically infeasible. There isn't any money for it. The last thing President Clinton can do, just as he's about to raise taxes to rebuild the nation's health-care system, is suggest a tax to save companies that could save themselves.



"...and thank you for flying Globus Airline. Or any airline, for that matter."

So what's the lesson? While the health-care industry may respond well to government action, the airline industry reveals its limits. Certainly there are things the government can do. It can encourage better labor relations. It probably should provide some tax relief, perhaps in the form of a lower ticket tax, especially since the new fuel tax will hit the industry hard. And the government can ban "predatory pricing" used by bigger airlines to undermine new entrants. But sweeping reform to redress the foibles of businesses in the marketplace isn't what's needed. Subsidizing inefficiencies that business itself can fix serves no one.

KEVIN KELLY

Kevin Kelly writes for Business Week. *He lives in Chicago.*

REPORT FROM ITALY

FINITA LA COMMEDIA

THE FIX IS OUT

Fed up with corruption, ineptitude, and economic hard times, in May Italians began a new experiment in government. For the first time since World War II, Italy has a government headed by a premier who is not a politician, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, longtime governor of Italy's Central Bank. Appointed to succeed Socialist Premier Giuliano Amato by Italy's president, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, Ciampi was able to form his cabinet without going through the customary negotiations among Italy's dominant parties that usually make up the ruling coalition. More than one-third of Ciampi's ministers have no party affiliation. The new government's program gives first priority to long overdue reforms.

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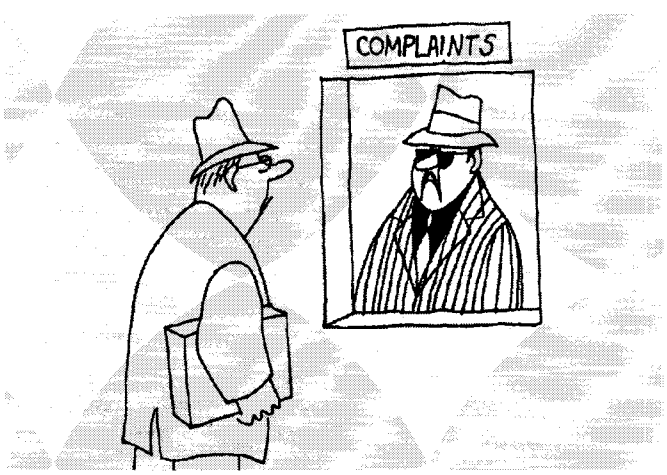
In a national referendum held in April, Italians voted overwhelmingly to replace an outmoded proportional representation system in the Senate with a majority system. The lopsided vote (29 million to 6 million) reflected pent-up popular exasperation against mismanagement of national and local affairs by mainstream political parties and was the reaction of a substantially healthy society. Public services in Italy cost more and are less efficient than elsewhere in the West. To speed mail delivery, industrial concerns in Milan use private couriers to post their mail just across the border in Switzerland. The recent explosion of protests in Italy, sparked by revelations of large-scale corruption, indicate that while most Italians may not be imbued with a puritan ethic, their tolerance of corruption is far from limitless.

Opposition to change can be expected from vested interests and from habits deeply ingrained in the government's pervasive bureaucracy. Ballot instructions for the recent referendums used such complex and obscure terms that many voters had trouble understanding them. In a Southern town, the chairman of one polling station had to come to the rescue of a citizen who, after forty-five minutes in the voting booth, had not been able to figure out how to mark the ballot.

A record sixteen parties are represented in the current Parliament, of which only six polled more than 5 percent of the vote. The smaller parties oppose any electoral reform likely to weaken or wipe them out. And sizable factions within the major parties—the Christian Democrats (CDs), the Socialists, and the former Communists, now renamed the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS)—are all opposed to radical departures from the proportional system, a system that insured professional pols a decisive voice in selecting candidates in national and local elections. But April's referendums not only backed electoral reforms but other curbs on the powers and privileges of politicians. For example, public financing for political parties is now out.

The hardest blow to the old party system, however, has come from state prosecutors. Over the past fifteen months, they have uncovered a vast web of corruption, built up over the years. To get lucrative public contracts, private operators must pay politicians up to 10 percent of the total costs. The largest shares seem to have gone to the CDs and the Socialists, with sizable cuts for the Communists (now PDS). Some crumbs were earmarked for the minor parties. So far, more than 1,500 politicians—including about 160 members of Parliament—have been arrested or investigated under "Operation Clean Hands." The magistrates conducting the investigation have become national heroes. Their point man, Antonio Di Pietro, is hailed by school children as Italy's Superman. On a recent visit to Rome's main jail, he was applauded even by many inmates.



"Never mind."

The long-ruling Christian Democrats and their Socialist partners have been increasingly weakened in recent elections. The main beneficiary has been the Northern League. It charges that the central government syphons off tax money from the industrial North to subsidize the backward South and to finance the corrupt party system. In next spring's general election, the League may poll up to 15 percent of the votes, right behind the PDS and the CDs (which anticipate 17 percent and 20 percent, respectively). The League abstained on the vote of confidence for the new Ciampi government, as did the PDS. League founder, Umberto Bossi, has toned down the movement's earlier demand that Italy be split into three separate republics, and now claims the league's goal is federalism. But he has not spelled out what this means, outside of granting greater regional and local autonomy. Some of the movement's top leaders still insist that their first priority is to draw clear-cut "frontiers" between the Po Valley and the rest of Italy.

According to one optimistic scenario, the Ciampi government might last until the spring of '94, when national elections could be coupled with the vote for the European Parliament. Meanwhile, a broad agreement needs to be reached on new electoral laws that can reconcile the main benefits of the majority system with some reassurance to the minor parties about their representation in Parliament.

A May bombing in Rome, which injured more than twenty people, and another in Florence, which killed six and damaged the renowned Uffizi Gallery, were sharp reminders of the danger still represented by the Mafia and other criminal organizations, who have links with political parties, notably in the South. On a recent visit to Sicily, Pope John Paul II called upon Catholics to stand up to the Mafia, an apparent response to recurrent charges of collusion between members of the Sicilian clergy and the "Honored Society." A year ago, the Mafia raised the level of violence, killing two Italian magistrates. Since then, the government, first headed by Premier Amato and now by Ciampi, has scored substantial successes against criminal organizations operating mostly in the South. New laws giving more powers to the police and the judiciary, as well as providing better protection for informers, have helped to round up hundreds of mobsters, including the "boss of the bosses" of Cosa Nostra, Toto' (Salvatore) Riina. But as the May bombings indicate, the Mafia is not about to go gently into the sunset.

On the economic front, where Premier Ciampi's competence and integrity are a big plus, new impetus will be given to an austerity program that calls for both tax increases and major spending cuts. For the first time, these cuts are intended to affect such sacred cows as old-age and disability pensions, and free health care. A stepped-up drive to privatize state holdings

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could contribute to further deficit reductions (the budget deficit now exceeds 10 percent of GNP, more than three times the average in the European Economic Community). Ciampi has also pledged to streamline the tax system. Italy's equivalent of the 1040 Form is a nightmare for most Italians, calling for answers of up to 255 questions. Change in Italy will not be easy. Still, the resourcefulness of many Italians, the ability of the country's democratic politicians to adjust, and the resilience of its national economy may yet save the day.

LEO J. WOLLEMBORG

Leo J. Wollemborg, a former contributor to Commonweal, *is a journalist living in Rome.*

OF SEVERAL MINDS David R. Carlin, Jr.

O SOLE MIA

THE FIRST NIXON PRIZE

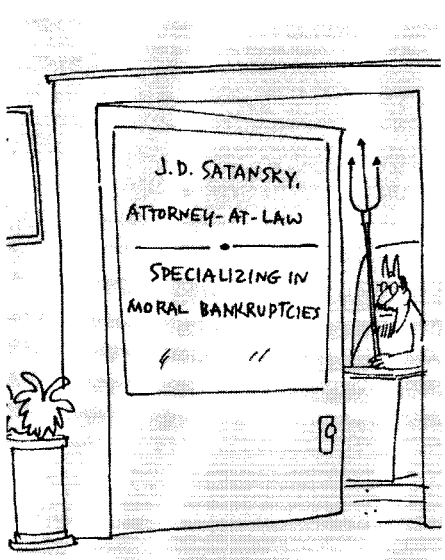
I hereby announce that Mia Farrow has won the first annual Richard Nixon Moral Philosopher of the Year Award. (It is named for Nixon because of his immortal words, "But that would be wrong.") Let me explain.

Though I have seen my share of Woody Allen movies over the years, I have never been a cult follower. The early movies seemed to me the kind that would have been made by a talented sophomore, and since I have always had something of a prejudice against sophomores, I stayed away from his films for years. By the time I broke down and returned, in the era of *Annie Hall*, I discovered to my delight that Woody had become a sort of American Chekhov. Unfortunately, this was the moment he was overdosing on Diane Keaton, a little bit of whom goes a long way. I found I could not take Diane playing Diane for the umpteenth time, so again I discontinued visits to Woody Allen movies.

I say this not by way of criticism but in order to confess my own inadequate knowledge of his *oeuvre*. Plainly I am no authority on Woody Allen the artist.

Nor am I an authority on Woody Allen the family man. At first I tried to ignore his legal dispute with Mia Farrow, but to no avail. I discovered it is not possible to live in America and remain successfully ignorant of the domestic troubles of Woody and Mia.

Nowadays when I think of Woody Allen, I am reminded of Pascal and his *Provincial Letters*. More precisely, I am reminded of Pascal's lampoon on Jesuit casuists of the seventeenth century. One of my favorite items in this work is Pascal's satirical account of the Jesuit who found a way to justify dueling, which was proscribed by the church but prescribed by the aristocratic code of honor. The good father explained that a Christian gentleman may not accept a challenge to a duel; but he may *pretend* to accept, at the same time making the appropriate mental reservation. Further, he may keep up this pretense until he finds himself on the field of honor facing an enemy who is armed with sword or pistol. But that alters the whole moral nature of the situation; in such circumstances one is morally entitled to defend oneself. For this is no longer a duel, which the church says is morally wrong; it is now a case of self-defense, which of course the church says is morally permissible.



A common-sense interpretation of Woody's affair with Mia's adopted daughter would say that the relationship is incestuous. After all, Allen's relationship with Mia Farrow was a virtual husband-wife connection, even though they were not officially married. Hence he was related to the daughter as a virtual stepfather. And when stepfathers have sexual relations with stepdaughters, that's incest. What could be more clear?

Enter Woody the casuist, resembling one of those tragicomic Chekhovian characters from his movies. No, it is not incest, he explains, his jesuitical logic running something like this: A virtual stepfather is not the same as a real stepfather. Had he and Mia officially married, then his relationship with the daughter would have been nothing less than a horrendous crime. But absent the formality of marriage, the relationship is simply a charming romantic adventure between an older man and a younger woman. A lovely May-and-December story. ("Oh, it's a long, long time....") So thin is the crucial line between moral turpitude and true love. Very similar, is it not, to the equally thin line dividing damnable dueling from meritorious self-defense?

Allen missed his century and calling. He would have made a good seventeenth-century Jesuit casuist, one of those who gave both the Jesuits and casuistry bad names.

At this point I should note that some members of the Nixon Award committee wanted to give the prize to Woody himself because of the great value he obviously attaches to the formality of marriage. In an age in which so many dismiss marriage as no more than a "piece of paper," Woody has demonstrated the vital importance of that document. It has the magical power of preventing one from doing the perfectly natural thing of going to bed with one's girlfriend's daughter.

But wiser heads prevailed, and the

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award went to Mia. The citation reads: "In an age of moral subjectivism; in an age in which moral codes are considered to be matters of personal preference, not matters of objective obligation; in an age in which we have learned to persuade ourselves that certain forms of inhuman conduct constitute a higher and more enlightened morality, provided they are done in the name of 'conscience' and 'honesty'—in such an age Mia Farrow is to be commended for having rediscovered an ancient truth, namely, that some things are just plain wrong, no matter how much you finesse and sophisticate them."

The trouble with contemporary America is not that we are morally corrupt. No doubt we are terrible sinners, but probably not much worse than most people at most times. No, the real trouble is that we have a theory of morality (or better, a theory of no-morality) which, if consistently acted upon, will eventually lead to immeasurable corruption. To date, we are a long way from having carried out all the implications of the theory, but we are making rapid progress. Abortion-on-demand is one implication, one we have thoroughly carried out. Euthanasia is another, which, thanks to Dr. Kevorkian's pioneering work, we are just learning to carry out. Incest between consenting adults is a further implication, which Woody Allen gets credit for discovering.

What Mia Farrow gets credit for is having sufficient moral intelligence to scream in pain. You may say it doesn't take much in the way of moral smarts to object to incest. Maybe not. But once upon a time it didn't take much moral intelligence to object to euthanasia and abortion-on-demand either. Let's give Mia credit for not being a good sport.

She can pick up her award at the *Commonweal* office. It is an old photo of Nixon as a senator and Checkers as a puppy. The dog is about to make a mess on the carpet, while the future president chides him, saying, "But that would be wrong." □

OF SEVERAL MINDS John Garvey

AN INCOHERENT CULTURE

LIFE AFTER 'OZZIE & HARRIET'

On cable access television in Westchester County, New York, you can watch a black nationalist as he threatens to kill white people or you can watch a neo-Nazi as he speaks of the need to send black people back to Africa and end the Jewish control of everything. The ACLU prepares to defend Dr. Jack Kevorkian's right to kill off depressed people. Conflicts between gay Irish and parade organizers disrupted the Saint Patrick's Day parade, as did conflicts between gay Jews and a parade celebrating Israel. In both cases it was a matter of rights versus rights: the rights of the gay groups who wanted to march versus the rights of the parade organizers.

There are great differences here—these are not all equivalent cases. I believe in the right to free speech, and it means tolerating even ACLU fundamentalists who see the right to free speech as absolute, but see the right to bear arms as very complicated. Like all fundamentalists, they really don't take the letter of the law all that seriously, but apply it to their favorite causes where it serves their purpose. What all of these cases have in common is that the idea of rights has been used, in each, to balkanize the society. This isn't done deliberately—in the parade cases, reading the interviews with people on both sides made it clear enough that people all seem to want a united society, one based on final agreement, and few people really want to win at the expense of others—but it is an inevitable result of making rights disproportionately important. Communitarians have done a valuable service in bringing the idea of common obligation back into the discussion.

You can learn something by contrasting the current atmosphere with the World War II-era movies in which there were scenes of (for example) a bus-full of people traveling across the country allowing themselves to be led in song. Those movies were as corny as could be, and could not be done today, except cynically. The fact that they could be done at all is something that separates that time from our own. It was no doubt part of the atmosphere in which wartime propaganda was sincerely produced and just as sincerely received, and so it is our form of socialist realism. At the same time there was something moving about the naiveté of it. It appealed to one version of the dream of the possibility of life lived in common. World War II was probably the beginning of the most recent form of this sentimentality, with GIs named O'Leary, Valucci, and Bernstein all headed into battle together. There were excluded minorities all over the place, but an ideal was suggested.

This outlook began to fall apart in the fifties. That era is often remembered in the popular imagination as a quiet time, and even the revisionism (justified, I think) of a writer like Garry Wills, who has argued that Eisenhower was a much better president than Kennedy or Johnson, does not obscure the general impression of a world in which "Ozzie and Harriet," and maybe Henry Luce's *Time*, were the major cultural influences.

But the fifties were much more complicated and interesting than that. The best abstract expressionist artists—deKooning, Kline, Pollock, Hartigan, Mitchell—were producing wonderful work. If you listen to the Miles Davis recordings from that era they sound fresh, immediate. This is the era in which the beat generation was born, jazz and art got interesting in new ways, and it was all detached from any sort of propaganda. The operative word was "cool." There was an understated reaction going on against those happy singers on the bus. Jack Kerouac could be as sentimental as those old movies, but he was part of a reaction against a deliberate civic culture, a wartime collectivity. The reaction was based on a vision of some genuinely beautiful but difficult-

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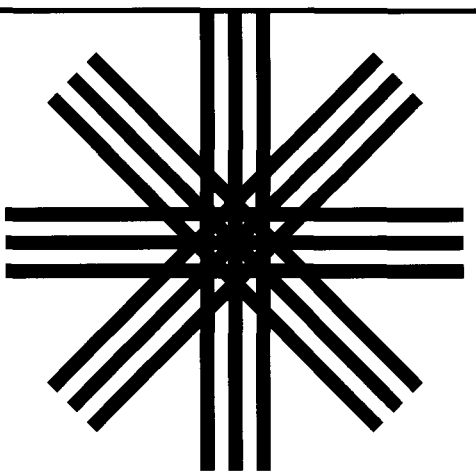
to-define things, and a realization that the civic culture was a lie. This realization was central to the sixties; Vietnam made the sixties happen, in combination with the vision of the fifties.

A lot of cultural history defines itself in reaction to wars. Dadaism and surrealism were reactions to World War I, serious rejections of what an important segment of the artistic community regarded as the presuppositions that led people to accept slaughter. There was an appropriate cynicism that followed the war. No one really knows what that war was about. The beat generation and bop were in their ways reactions to the world revealed in World War II and Korea.

It may be technologically impossible to have another world war, at least in the propaganda sense. During the forties there were only a few radio networks, a relatively few channels of information that could reach great numbers of people within a fairly short time, and they had a friendly attitude toward the people they represented to the public and served. The subservience of the *Washington Post*'s Ben Bradlee to the Kennedy family may have been the last time that was possible. But that is because of technology; the war in Vietnam wasn't one that had the filter earlier wars had. There was no equivalent, in Vietnam, to Ernie Pyle or other cheerleading World War II journalists. It is more difficult to manufacture consensus now, and such technologies as cable television and desk-top publishing offer a much more diverse range of voices and viewpoints. While it may be true that, as A.J. Liebling wrote, "freedom of the press belongs to the man who owns one," it is easier now to own one: technology makes a press a little more affordable. In some ways this is exciting and offers an unprecedented opportunity for cultural democracy, but the opportunity happens in a society which increasingly sees itself made up of competing interest groups. The sense of *any* common society is eroding fast, and in this context the communitarian impulse is an important one.

I see a problem here, though: that is the idea that this sense of common, mutual obligation can be brought about by political means. A movement away from a rights-based approach to many legal questions may be a beginning, but it could be that the rights-based discourse that currently dominates the political scene is the reflection of a fragmented culture, and not its cause. The question facing us is whether we can move toward a common sense of what we are as a society.

The kind of propaganda that seemed to move most Americans during World War II is probably not possible any more, and isn't desirable. Nor is it possible to coerce us into common understanding, through law. Whether it is possible for us to move away from the increased divisiveness that seems inevitable at present is a vital question. The tensions are not simply expressions of cultural diversity; the divisions are deeper than that, and have to do with radical and irreconcilable visions of what life is meant to be about. It is impossible to think of a society continuing as a single thing, in any sense, unless there is a profound movement in another direction. □



THE GRAYMOOR PRIZE

The Friars of Atonement announce the fourth annual Graymoor Prize, to be awarded to the best essay on any aspect of ecumenical or interreligious affairs. Our previous winners have reported from England, Wales, Jerusalem, Eisenach, Germany, and Chicago, among other places. From the euphonious Anthea Dove (1993) to the exotic Ty Mam Duw Community (1992) to the formidable Ed Marciniak (1991), Graymoor winners have written about the difficulties as well as the satisfactions, the personal as well as the theological dimensions of ecumenical work. The prize is intended to encourage and support new ecumenical and interreligious ideas and perspectives. The award-winning submission, which may take the form of a scholarly or critical essay or a personal narrative, should appeal to the interests of the general educated reader.

Original and unpublished essays of approximately 2,500-4,000 words should be submitted to the editors of COMMONWEAL who will make the final decision following consultation with a panel of experts. The winning essay will receive $1,000 and will be published in COMMONWEAL. The editors reserve the right to select more than one winner or not to award the prize at all.

Deadline: October 1, 1993. Announcement of Prize: December 17, 1993. The prize-winning essay will be published in COMMONWEAL's January 14, 1994, issue. This essay will become the property of the Graymoor Ecumenical Institute. All other essays will be returned to their authors after January 1.

COMMONWEAL 15 Dutch Street, New York, NY 10038

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'HUMANAE VITAE': WHAT HAS IT DONE TO US?

AND WHAT IS TO BE DONE NOW?

KENNETH UNTENER

Twenty-five years ago—on July 25, 1968—Pope Paul VI issued the encyclical *Humanae vitae*, reaffirming the church's ban on the use of chemical or physical contraceptives in marital intercourse, while acknowledging the worthiness of sexual relations in marriage during the woman's periods of infertility. The bishops of Vatican II had left this issue undecided pending completion of studies by a special commission appointed by John XXIII and expanded by Paul VI. Though a large majority of the commission recommended modification of the church's teaching, the encyclical dismissed its findings; *Humanae vitae* "excluded...any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means."

Today the consequences of the pope's decision are widely acknowledged: most married Catholics have not accepted his conclusion, and many bishops and priests have either disagreed or voiced reservations. In the following essay, Bishop Kenneth Untener, ordinary of the diocese of Saginaw, Michigan, responds to a request from the editors for his reflections on the pastoral consequences of the encyclical. THE EDITORS

I have been asked to describe the effects of *Humanae vitae* on the church. One should be able to do this regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with the contents of the encyclical.

In measuring the effects on the whole church, we are dealing primarily with people's perceptions. Most people haven't read *Humanae vitae*, although they know that in one section it reaffirmed the teaching against artificial birth control. They also know that the findings of the papal study commission on birth control—which recommended a change in the church's teaching—were not accepted, and they have watched how dissent has been handled. Their reactions are generally negative.

The encyclical is certainly not the sole cause, but it appears to have contributed to an attitude among Catholics that authoritative teachings can be brushed aside, and that church discipline (e.g., Sunday Mass attendance) is less binding. It has made it more difficult to defend our position on abortion, and exacerbated the negative attitude of many women toward the church. Those who teach and preach have felt less confident in attempting to provide guidance in sexual matters. Lay people are increasingly suspicious of the willingness of the hierarchy to listen to them on important matters. The surge of freshness and hope felt by so many during and just after Vatican II seems to have taken a downturn since the encyclical.

It could be argued that 1968 was about the time when most or all of these things would have begun happening anyway, and *Humanae vitae* is being made the scapegoat. It teaches a hard message, but it is the long hard road that must be taken against prevailing attitudes toward sexuality and marriage.

Whatever the merits of that assertion, we are still left with the public perception of the way in which *Humanae vitae* came to be. and how the church has dealt with the widespread dissent that followed. In the eyes of many people, the teaching church has committed a teacher's cardinal sin: it has become more concerned about itself than about truth.

No analogy is perfect, but the following may help explain how many people see the church on the issue of birth control.

The map or the terrain?

Picture early maps drawn by explorers of North America. You can recognize Florida, the Great Lakes, the outline of both coasts. The contours are real, not figments of their imagination, for they walked the terrain, climbed the hills, sailed the lakes and rivers. Gradually the maps changed. The terrain didn't. The maps did.

They changed because others also walked the land and sailed the waters, and because new technology gave us additional data. It was the same continent, but now we knew it differently. If in the face of all this, early mapmakers insisted on the correctness of their original map and refused to listen to the cumulative experience of others who had walked the land, or refused to accept the new information provided by technology, we would begin to suspect their motives. They would appear to be more concerned about defending their map than the truth of the terrain.

BISHOP KENNETH UNTENER *heads the diocese of Saginaw.*

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In the formulation and subsequent handling of *Humanae vitae*, many people look upon the church in this way. In their eyes, we opted to cling to the contours of our earlier teachings on birth control without regard for the data we have subsequently received—from married people who have walked the terrain, from science, from theologians, from pastoral leaders. We simply put aside the findings of the study commission and reissue the same map. Then in the years that follow we have official conferences and invite speakers who *a priori* are committed to the defense of the map. We pretend before all the world that our best and brightest and holiest believe that the map is true. Indeed, those who speak at such conferences may well be persons of the highest integrity who believe the map is true. But everyone knows that they are a select minority, and the ultimate criterion for their selection is their loyalty to the map.

Observers begin to suspect our motives. The terrain no longer appears to be our issue. Our map is the issue. We fear that if we make even the slightest change, we will lose some of our authority as mapmakers. Again, whatever your judgment on the contents of *Humanae vitae*, this is the perception of many people on the formulation and subsequent handling of the encyclical. It has damaged our credibility.

Credibility

It is hardly a subtle insight to suggest that since *Humanae vitae*, church teaching authority has been less credible in the eyes of very many people, including many Catholics.

If the reason were simply that people turn us off when we preach hard truths, then this is something we must endure. Our task is to preach the gospel in season and out of season, and we must not become alarmed if people don't like what we say.

I believe, however, that there is a different reason for the loss of credibility. Like it or not, justified or unjustified, the fact is many people think that church leaders say one thing publicly and another privately. When we profess our public support for *Humanae vitae*, or when we engage in "a conspiracy of silence," they feel we lack integrity.

This presents a very serious problem. It is one thing when people angrily disagree with us, as in many social and economic issues. It is quite another when people cynically dismiss us as dissemblers. In the eyes of many, the issue has shifted. It is no longer an honest evaluation of the moral implications of artificial birth control. The issue is loyalty to church authority.

In a recent address describing ways in which dissent from *Humanae vitae* has had adverse effects, Avery Dulles, S. J. (*Origins*, April 22, 1993), pointed out what others have frequently observed, namely, that it is used as a loyalty test. Qualified theologians who have expressed reservations about the encyclical are "excluded from sensitive teaching positions and from appointments to episcopal committees." He also noted that priests who dissent appear to be ineligible to be appointed as bishops. If this be true, something has gone awry.

The approach to truth

There is another effect of *Humanae vitae* that is less obvious but deserves attention. It has to do with our approach to truth.

In the decades before Vatican II, there began to re-emerge an approach to church teaching that seemed very healthy. I say "re-emerge" because it was not new—Thomas Aquinas, among others, had used it. This model emphasized that every effort to conceptualize or put into words the mysteries of our faith falls short. Our teachings need continually to be rethought so that we can understand them more fully, not simply explain more effectively what we already know perfectly well. Human science, culture, philosophy, experience enable us to shape our understanding of the great truths. The truths themselves endure, but we are able to penetrate them in new ways, and thus be more true to these truths.

In his address at the solemn opening of Vatican II, John XXIII affirmed this approach. He pointed out that our duty is not only to guard the precious treasure of our doctrine, "as if we were concerned only with antiquity, but to dedicate ourselves with an earnest will and without fear to that work which our era demands of us." He went on to say:

> ...the Christian, Catholic, and apostolic spirit of the whole world expects a step forward toward a doctrinal penetration and a formation of consciousness in faithful and perfect conformity to the authentic doctrine, which, however, should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought. The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration with patience if necessary, everything being measured in the forms and proportions of a magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character.

Compare this to the approach represented by Pius X in his 1907 "Syllabus Condemning the Errors of the Modernists." Among the sixty-five errors condemned was the following: "The dogmas the church holds out as revealed are not truths which have fallen from heaven. They are an interpretation of religious facts which the human mind has acquired by laborious effort."

That statement was condemned as false, and ultimately it is. But if we look upon its reverse, as one looks at a negative in photography, the opposite statement would seem to affirm that revealed truths indeed have fallen from heaven, and there is little need for the laborious efforts and interpretations of the human mind as we try to understand them. It is almost as though the church keeps truths in hermetically sealed containers, and our understanding of them is unaffected by culture, science, human experience. These latter may help us explain these truths more effectively, but our understanding of the truths themselves is not at all shaped by developments in the world around us.

Again, prescinding from whether you think that *Humanae*

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vitae is correct or incorrect in its position on birth control, the process by which it was developed, and the way in which it has been handled these twenty-five years seem to represent this latter approach. This has had a wide effect which I believe to be a negative one. It set back the reemergence of an approach that is desperately needed as we move into the postmodern world.

What to do?

The only solution, it seems to me, is to have honest and open discussion, at least in acknowledging that after twenty-five years *Humanae vitae* hasn't been accepted by the majority of Catholics.

I expressed some of these concerns to the assembled bishops of the United States at our November 1990 meeting. We were debating a document on guidelines for education in human sexuality, and one section referred to the teaching on birth control in a way that seemed to imply that it was one of those "givens" that everyone accepted. It was in that context that I spoke and I shall close by quoting this hitherto unpublished statement:

"I believe that the proposed document on guidelines for education in human sexuality is well written, and that the section on birth control is written with much sensitivity. Yet, as I read that section, I found myself asking questions, and I wonder if the time has come to ask the questions out loud. I have four questions.

"1. In the text we briefly restate the teaching on birth control and say, 'We hope that the logic expressed here is compelling.' I wonder how we can claim credibility when we make a statement like that knowing in fact that the logic is not compelling. It is not compelling to people in general...not compelling to the Catholic laity...not compelling to many priests...and not compelling to many bishops. When we know this, and don't say it, many would compare us to a dysfunctional family that is unable to talk openly about a problem that everyone knows is there.

"2. We also say, 'It is our earnest belief that God's Spirit is acting through the magisterium...in developing this doctrine.' This is true, but it is not the entire truth. It is also the earnest belief of our church that the Spirit acts through the entire people of God in developing doctrine.

"The *sensus fidelium* is, of course, more than an opinion poll. But when people disagree with us, we cannot simply assume that it is mere opinion.

"The *sensus fidelium* is more than a head count, but the beliefs in the heads and hearts of our people must count for something. Thus, my question: Do we have adequate structures and procedures to listen to the *sensus fidelium*, particularly on this issue?

"3. In the same text we call for those who dissent to study and pray over their position. Could they not say to us, 'We will, if you will...and let's do it together?' Would such a process weaken the authority of the bishops, or would it in fact strengthen our authority?

"4. Yesterday we passed a document on Family Ministry, and we renewed our commitment 'to listen perceptively, trustingly, and compassionately to what people are saying about their Christian understanding of marriage, sexuality, and family life.' I tried that last week with our Saginaw Pastoral Council. You must understand, these are not dissidents. These are a wide mixture of people, totally dedicated to the church. They found great problems with this particular section on birth control. (I note that the bishops advisory council also had problems with this section.)

"After some discussion, I passed out slips of paper and asked them to write down 'yes' or 'no' on whether they agreed with this section. They were not to sign their names. The count was one yes and twenty-two no. I am wondering what would happen if you did the same with your pastoral council. I am wondering what would happen if you did the same with your priests. I am wondering what would happen if we did it among ourselves right here.

"Those are my questions, and I pose them as questions. I ask them up front and out loud, in the conviction that if we do not ask them, we are unintentionally causing great damage to the credibility and the unity of this church that we love."

When asked what he thought about the laity, Cardinal Newman said something like, "Well, the church would look strange without them." We are without them on *Humanae vitae*, and we look strange. We've got to do something about that. □

James Thielman

Not Far

Somewhere
stars that used to be
are sending their last
rays to touch earth
light years from now.

Not that far from here
sunlight from the day
when we were born
is moving on,
ready to arrive.

Standing there
we see an earth
about to hold us and
we rush to pick
up something we
might need for
a life we soon
begin to remember.

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TAKE YOUR SHOES OFF MY BOOKS

NEGOTIATING A HINDU-CATHOLIC MARRIAGE

JO McGOWAN

When my husband, Ravi, and I married thirteen years ago, we had plenty of God-given disparities to keep us busy. I was twenty-one and he was thirty-three. I am American and he is from India. I am a Roman Catholic who attends Mass, keeps the prescribed fasts, and uses a breviary. He is a Hindu who prays daily, and abjures temples and idol-worship. I am a college drop-out and a professional writer; he is a Ph.D. in metallurgy turned environmental activist. We live in India, in the foothills of the Himalayas, on a combined yearly income of somewhat less than $5,000. You would think that when we disagreed, it would be over something substantial—at any rate, something more substantial than a sofa set.

You would be wrong. The sofa set in question belonged to friends, a British couple who had lived in our town for eight years. They had it built their first year here and it had been heavily used by them and their two young boys, a cat, two dogs, and an endless parade of friends. It was, to be sure, an exceptionally comfortable set, deep and roomy, with just the right amounts of sink and spring to encourage leisurely reading, and conversation; but a living room containing it would not be a candidate for a *House Beautiful* award. I had, though I try not to be materialistic, coveted it since the day they announced that they were being transfered to Africa and intended to sell most of their furniture.

Without exactly discussing it with my husband, I arranged with my friends to buy it for about half what they had paid and perhaps a tenth what it would cost to buy new. When I told Ravi, he said it was up to me, but in his innocence, he assumed I was buying only the couch.

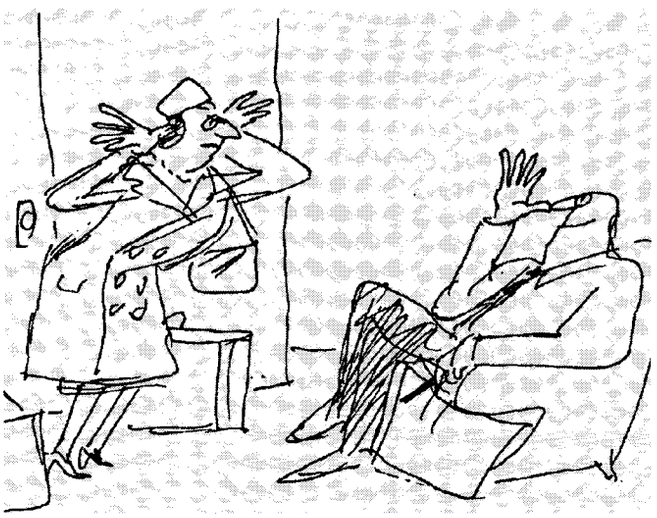
He was at work when it all arrived—an enormous couch and two large chairs which had doubled in size on the trip from my friends' large living room to our small one—and I did my best to make it fit in unobtrusively. But even I had to admit that the effect was a bit staggering. We'll get used to it, I assured him when he walked in and nearly tripped over the chair that *was* a bit too close to the door for comfort.

Our children, at least, were delighted. They tumbled the length of the couch and did headstands on the chairs, just as I had done in my childhood. And just as my mother had, I scolded them about ruining the springs and pointed out the heel marks on the walls. I gave that up rather sooner than she had, however, as it suddenly occurred to me that my concern for furniture was proof of my husband's contention that we were becoming a bourgeois, middle-class family, anxious to acquire symbols of status, eager for a life of indolence and wealth.

Before moving to India, it had never occurred to me that a secondhand, eight-year-old sofa set could be a status symbol. But then again, I grew up in America, where reality is very different. To me, a refrigerator is an absolute necessity; to Ravi, pure luxury.

Over the years (we've lived in India for twelve), we've done our share of compromising. I got the fridge on day one—even a purist like my husband had to concede that expecting a New Englander who wilted in Massachusetts summers to survive in temperatures of 115 F. without one was too much—but it was the smallest model. It was I who banned a television, although Ravi would love one (he says he needs it for "information"), and we both agreed not to invest in a car (although I have been less enthusiastic with each additional child; dragging all three on Indian public transport isn't easy).

The discussions we had over each of these items, however, were reasoned and logical and had to do with practical concerns: milk spoiling, the effect of TV on family life, and the



JO McGOWAN, *a regular contributor to* Commonweal, *is a free-lance writer living in India.*

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convenience of a car vs. the expense and the pollution. We seldom got emotional and we usually could explain ourselves.

The sofa set, on the other hand, seemed to touch both of us in a deep and inarticulate way, stirring up images of childhood and forcing us to confront our values, both individually and as a couple.

One night not long after the sofa arrived neither of us could sleep. We lay on opposite ends of the couch, our legs overlapping in the middle (and even he had to admit it was comfortable) and talked about living in India. Somehow this led us to the sofa set and what it meant to each of us.

To me, a big, comfortable couch is at the center of family life. I got quite emotional describing my memories to Ravi: the afternoon story hours with my mother in the center of the couch and all seven of us ranged on either side of her; the days when I would be home sick and my mother would set me up on the couch for the day, a box of Kleenex and a bell with which to call her by my side; the times when I would see her sitting on the couch, nursing the current baby, cuddling her or him until sleep arrived...."It's like a big kitchen table," I concluded. "It's essential."

Ravi found this argument quite unpersuasive, and focused first on a side issue. "You *rang a bell* for your mother?" he asked, horrified.

"Only when I was sick," I said, defensively.

"It doesn't matter how sick you were. A child never rings a bell for her mother, as if she were a servant."

"Well, unlike you," I said hotly, "we didn't grow up with servants, so the thought of treating my mother as one never occurred to me. And anyway, it was a big house. A bell was practical."

He just shook his head, still shocked, still unconvinced.

"But, anyway, Ravi, the point isn't the bell—it's the couch."

He, however, refused to concede anything. My comparison to the kitchen table fell flat: *he* didn't grow up with one. In his family, the children ate in a long row on the floor while the grown-ups took turns at the very small fold-down dining table. Family spirit did not suffer as a result.

As for the couch, although they had not one but three in their living room, there were no cuddling sessions or story hours which took place there. Children and adults operated in separate spheres and the couches were adult territory, meant for entertaining adult guests.

It was the middle-class propriety of it all which bothered him now, so many years later: the formal entertaining, the apparent desire to impress one's guests with possessions. It didn't matter, he pointed out, whether *we* thought of a sofa set as a great acquisition; everyone else most assuredly did. "My activist friends think I've sold out," he said, "I can't say what's going on in their minds, but I do know they are uncomfortable coming here now."

This, I had to admit, seemed true. I remembered coming home one afternoon to find Ravi sitting in one of the big chairs talking with three villagers. They were huddled close together at one end of the couch, perched awkwardly on its edge as if fearing to get it dirty, and my arrival made them even more nervous.

Obviously, this didn't make me happy. But why, I asked (in what I hoped was not too plaintive a tone) should I give up what I considered normal and ordinary to reassure people who would find me strange no matter what I did? As long as my skin remained white, my Hindu accented, my body language Western, and my style casual, loose-limbed, and free, I was going to be an enigma and a puzzle to the average Indian villager. What difference would a sofa set make?

The discussion could have gone on and on. What we were really talking about was the paradox at the heart of every marriage: the wedding of two entirely different worlds and the constant adjustments and fine tuning required to make it all work. In a marriage like ours, however, the requirements are at times, excessive. Worlds farther apart than a Hindu's India and a Catholic's America are hard to imagine, and there are times when I wonder how we ever thought our love could bridge the gap between the two. In our family lore, our favorite stories are of the times we transgressed some deeply held belief of the other's, all the while totally unconscious of having offended.

My worst mistake occurred soon after our marriage. I was tidying up our apartment in a hurry just before a weekend out of town. I had put a pair of shoes on top of a pile of books meaning to take the shoes down the hall to the closet when I left the room. In a rush to get to the train on time, however, I left them where they were. On Sunday night, we returned, tired and happy after our trip. The mood evaporated instantly when Ravi saw my shoes.

"Who did this?" he shouted, practically leaping across the room to snatch them up off the books.

"Did what?" I asked, bewildered, thinking perhaps we had been robbed.

"Put these shoes on top of these *books*?" he thundered.

"Well, I guess I did. What are you so upset about?" I was still bewildered.

When he calmed down (it took a while), he explained that what I had done was a sacrilege. Books were a representation of Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom. To put shoes, the dirtiest thing an Indian can think of, anywhere near her was contempt and profanity of the worst kind. "Please don't ever do it again," he begged me.

Needless to say, I never have and now, having lived so long in India, I cannot even believe that I ever did; the idea of it shocks me as much as it did him.

His first mistake was not quite so dramatic, or perhaps it only seems less so because I have become so accustomed to Indian ways. We were married in the U.S. and his parents, niece, and several cousins came from India for the wedding. We spent our wedding night and the day after on Cape Cod and the next evening we drove back to our apartment, stopping on the way to pick up his parents and niece.

This seemed strange to no one but me. For the next two

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months (our honeymoon!) I lived as if in a foreign country. They spoke almost exclusively in Punjabi (not a word of which I could understand), cooked only Indian food, went shopping in Indian stores, and entertained Indian friends and relatives. All of it might have been bearable, but during our whole engagement I had treasured a romantic image of our first year as newlyweds: the candlelight dinners, the lazy Sunday mornings with croissants and the newspapers...time to get to know each other, to play house. Instead, I seemed to be constantly struggling to get a translation: by the time I could get Ravi's attention to ask what they were all in stitches about, they'd be on to the next story and he'd be too busy listening to bother with me.

What troubled me most in those days was that he didn't really understand why I was so upset. Of course, he could see that no one enjoys being left out, but he couldn't see why the timing bothered me so. "We've got our whole lives to be together," he pointed out quite logically. "We'll have our honeymoon once they leave. This is a once-in-a-lifetime trip for them."

But even while I conceded that I was being selfish and immature, I still believed there was something crucial in the fact that he didn't share my disappointment. And indeed, as I learned more about the Indian concept of marriage, I found I was right. To him, the awkward situation I was in *vis-à-vis* his family was perfectly ordinary for a new bride in India who must adjust herself to a *family*, not, as the Western version would have it, participate in a process with her husband whereby each of them adjusts to the other.

To his credit, Ravi has proved remarkably open to *my* preconceived ideas and has more or less gracefully accepted the fact that much is required from both of us. He has occasional relapses when we are with his family; old habits die hard. But I am no longer twenty-one, I speak the language now, and I have made my own adjustments, not the least of which has been learning to make *chapatties*.

The difficulties of a cross-cultural marriage are enormous, there can be no denying. But the rewards are equally great. When I consider Ravi's virtues as a husband, words like fidelity and devotion come to mind, old-fashioned virtues met less and less frequently in the standard American marriage. Marrying into a traditional culture where marriage is still a sacred bond and divorce still a scandal provides a security that I, for one, am grateful for. The institution is stronger than the individual couple and provides a firm and certain footing which makes it possible to take a great deal for granted.

In America, on the other hand, many couples seem to begin married life with the sense of charting unknown waters, ever mindful of the dangers of the journey and the flimsiness of their vessel. Here in India, the path is so well-worn and safe arrival so virtually assured that one hardly considers the bullock cart one is traveling in. The jolts and occasional breakdowns are expected and taken in stride and there are plenty of fellow pilgrims to ask for directions. And at the end of the day there's that couch to sink into and relax on. Like our marriage, it looks like it's here to stay. □

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INTO THE CITY OF FAITHFULNESS

NEGOTIATING A JEWISH-CATHOLIC MARRIAGE

DARIA DONNELLY

A poet and friend of my mother gave us a magnificent and enduring wedding gift three years ago. She called while we were planning our liturgy and asked us to read Zechariah 8, which she had heard at daily Mass. "This is what you are doing," she announced. At that moment, we were pasting and cutting for our program, discussing and fretting over details that now cannot be recalled. The wedding was close enough that in our preoccupied and harried minds marriage had become a series of selections: Each other, an appropriate ceremony, china and silver patterns. Zechariah stood like a beacon, stopped us, allowed us to see what we were doing. This is the passage as it was read for our wedding:

> Thus said the Lord: I have returned to Zion, and I will dwell in Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be called the City of Faithfulness, and the mount of the Lord of Hosts the Holy Mount.
>
> Thus said the Lord of hosts: There shall yet be old men and women in the squares of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the squares of the city shall be crowded with boys and girls playing in the squares.
>
> Thus said the Lord of hosts: I will rescue my people from the lands of the east and from the lands of the west and I will bring them home to dwell in Jerusalem. They shall be my people, and I will be their God—in truth and sincerity.
>
> These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to one another, render true and perfect justice in your gates. And do not contrive evil against one another, and do not love perjury, because all those are the things I hate—declares the Lord.
>
> Thus said the Lord of hosts: Peoples and the inhabitants of many cities shall yet come—the inhabitants shall go to the other and say, "Let us go and entreat the favor of the Lord, let us seek the Lord of hosts; I will go too." The many peoples of the multitude of nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the Lord.
>
> Thus said the Lord of hosts: In those days, ten men from nations of every tongue will take hold—they will take hold of every Jew by a corner of his cloak and say, "let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

I love this passage for many reasons: I feel the heartbreaking beauty of the City of Faithfulness which pictures our simple and elusive desires: to live long and in safety, to have joyful children. I appreciate the weird comedy of the international minyans converging on Jerusalem. Most importantly, the passage reflects what I am struggling to do in my life and my marriage.

My husband is a Jew and I am a Catholic. I have taken hold of the corner of two cloaks: the Jew Jesus and the Jew with whom I am sharing my life. In moments of grace these two cloaks are seamless and one. At other times I am more aware of the contrary pulls, a confusing array of identities and desires.

Love and marriage do not mark the beginning of my participation in what is known as the Jewish-Christian encounter. I was raised in an urban, predominantly Jewish, neighborhood set on a hill. At the top of the hill, where we lived and shopped, Mrs. Stein took measurements for my Catholic school uniform; we bought cookies and train-shaped birthday cakes in a bak-

DARIA DONNELLY *grew up in Pittsburgh and teaches literature at Boston University.*

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ery that had unfamiliar looking bread that we never bought. Our neighbors were all either Jewish or Catholic and the only barrier to us children playing together was that we all went to different schools.

As one descended the hill the differences sharpened. On the slope was a bakery, a bagel factory, a religious supply store, all of which seemed for other people. I entered them only once or twice as a child and felt I shouldn't be there. Challah and kosher meat prices were in store windows. Yarmulke, payess, and wigs adorned the men, women, and children in the streets. We stayed at the top of the hill, passing down in my father's car enroute to school. Yet even this strangeness had its familiarity.

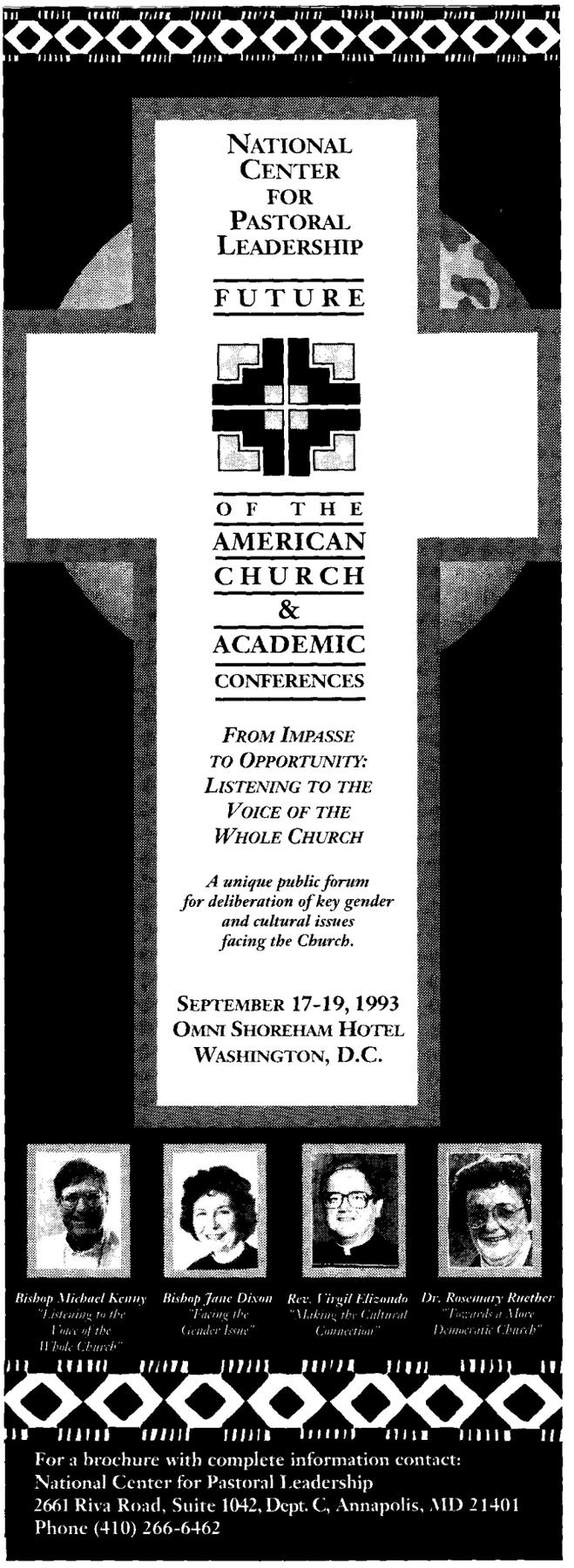
In college I began to think about my neighborhood differently. At some level the personal, the encounters with Mrs. Stein, gave way to the sociological: the hilltop as wealthier, more assimilated, more cosmopolitan; the slope as more Orthodox, poorer, more insular. At another level, my understanding of my neighborhood and identity became increasingly personal; my roommates and closest friends in college were Jewish and Catholic. We spent long hours in conversation describing our past, talking about our beliefs. We took one another to Mass, to Kol Nidre service. We met each others' families and ate each others' food.

I majored in religion and in my senior year I had the great fortune to study the New Testament with a superb scholar of first-century Judaism and Christianity. For the first time in my life I studied the Gospels with a Jew. I had to put away received pieties and encounter a text that suddenly seemed alarmingly unfamiliar. I wept in my teacher's office; I signed up for another course with him.

In this second course eight of us, half Christians, half Jews, took on the subject of Jewish-Christian relations; we studied Christian anti-Semitism, God and theology after Auschwitz, and Jewish intellectuals, such as Simone Weil, who were moved by Jesus. The course was a permanently transforming experience. The professor, who was thin as a stick, seemed like a ghost when he appeared each week at our apartment door to drop off his pale son for a violin lesson with my roommate. We barely spoke to each other at these times. In class he was animated, demanding, agonized. It was as if his life energy were poured out in front of us.

In a strange way, I feel that my marriage disqualifies me from the intellectual Jewish-Christian dialogue. At the same time it gives me a different perspective on that dialogue. In those college classes and later, in Jerusalem, I was able to talk about issues as both a disinterested and an implicated party. Now I am a Christian who is married to a Jew: I am more needful of the dialogue and I also understand that a marriage such as ours is at the center of controversy in the dialogue. I feel fewer resources for the intellectual debate because my experience has become so overwhelmingly personal. Yet I believe that our experience has something to say to the scholarly debate.

Who would be surprised that religion is lived not only with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mind and heart but also with personality, family, and community—and with all the prejudices, quirks, and drama that these imply? This truth is thrown into sharper relief in intermarriage, particularly around the wedding celebration. The family and community drama of a wedding reaches an intensity tantamount to caricature. Explaining kosher laws to an Italian chef and my desire for butter to my husband's family were moments of high seriousness and comedy. The anxiety and affection of those moments are central to understanding the work of ecumenism.

Intermarried couples are the repository of both the good news and the bad news of ecumenism. The bad news was the familiarity of the prejudices each heard about the other and the shocking newness of those we heard about ourselves, as if prejudice had entered our skin so deeply that it could only be shocked out by the opacity of the mirror held to nature.

The most persistent and oddest negative response to our marrying had to do with safety. My husband was accused of attempting to find safety from his identity. I was told I was making myself vulnerable to a life of contempt. We hadn't considered ourselves safe or unsafe. Of the thousand ways in which we are all vulnerable, this aspect of our identity seemed no more significant than our gender or the era and place in which we lived. It revealed the deep fear and skepticism of Jews about their place in America and the world as well as the submerged Christian understanding of the Jews as marginal, as unable to be protected whether by the state or salvation or something else.

It is also the deep privilege of the intermarried couple to allow people to express their most sublime experiences of God and of religious ecumenism. We are told stories. Last week, for example, I was told of two Orthodox Jewish women reciting the Our Father at the funeral Mass of a writer. When asked how they knew this prayer they said that their mother, a pious Jew, had thought it a beautiful prayer, taught it to them, and said it regularly with them.

The impulse of religious people is to support us. We are comforted with stories, with a family appreciation for both sets of spiritual insight and observance. The church and synagogue are welcoming. This is the beautiful side of the safety coin. People believe we need more kindness, more consolation, more protection.

The impulse of secular people is to be glad of us. Our prayers, candle lighting, Mass, and synagogue attendance are curiosities perhaps, but we stand as a sign that religious difference is not inevitably fracturing.

The real challenge in our marriage comes from within, from what we are and what we have internalized. "Jewish love is thick," a friend told me, "because life is all." Sometimes I am overwhelmed by the perfect contentment in my husband's love; as if from the very beginning I was educated into a love that contains thirst and cannot grasp this other thing.

Sometimes we are cranky because the presence of the other illuminates the triumphalism and plain wrongheadedness of our practice of faith in a way we might repress were we alone. I find myself rolling my eyes at sermons that present the Pharisees as mere hypocrites; I am discontent each Good Friday liturgy; I blanch at the words to hymns like "Lift High the Cross." This increased self-examination and criticism is a gain but also a burden. We are sometimes weary and want to rest in the pattern of faith that has nurtured and consoled us from birth.

We also know that we are immensely lucky in that our faiths are fundamentally contiguous; Christianity and rabbinic Judaism were born at the same historical moment as reformations of temple-based Judaism. We deepen the other's faith by proximity, discussion, even debate. The outsider mind causes each of us to see aspects of our faith in entirely fresh ways. Everywhere we hear echoes.

There are great challenges ahead of us. We have realized that two intensely rational, intellectual adults have a center that is beautifully and terrifyingly irrational. We go around issues—good and evil, the meaning of pain—and there is a core difference that rationality cannot penetrate. We have not had the great fortune to have a child as yet, but our anticipation and anxiety are already alive. We know that undiscovered fears, assumptions, and prejudices will emerge as we raise an unformed mind and heart.

In our marriage, born of desire, we are trying to bring each other into the City of Faithfulness. In a modest way we see ourselves as a sign of hope in times of increasing nationalism, fundamentalism, and religious warfare. Mourning the tragedy of Sarajevo, we embrace the comedy of our marriage. We are moved by the love of our communities who keep moving us forward and who allow us to believe that old people with canes and young children with laughter will fill the streets in safety and joy. □

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'GOOD RIDDANCE!' SAID GRANDMA

LOVE: THE FRUIT OF MARRIAGE, NOT THE CAUSE

WILLIAM HOUGHTON

At times I think that I would put up a handsome dowry, work through a broker, and arrange marriages for my children, if only I could circumvent the process of meeting a suitor, meeting the in-laws, bracing for a proposal, and having negotiations fall through. A back-room deal for cash—just business, nothing personal, no questions asked—seems preferable to the ritual of romance to me, though there are problems with both.

My twenty-three-old daughter went with a young man for four years, almost a marriage, and we thought he was a fine person. She glowed when she was with him, and she wrote back to us about every step in his career, which came to seem more important than her own. He spent a summer at our house, and came with us on vacation. He sat in a chair in the living room quietly reading, wearing a cloak of silence (rather welcome after our raucous son). He was quiet but he spoke thoughtfully about politics, and said funny things about others and himself. He never expressed a strong emotion. My wife liked his eagerness to help with dishes, and I appreciated his handiness with household repairs. One time we met with his parents, and liked them too, though they seemed a little formal. I saw my daughter and the young man—perhaps through rose-colored glasses—as the ideal couple.

Then he told her that he did not think "it would work," she was too jealous and demanding, and he broke off the relationship, giving her a hug and putting her in a taxicab. (Later, he said he was "cruel to be kind," putting himself in a better light.)

My daughter came home sobbing and inconsolable, she said her life was wrecked and she would rather be dead. The sight of her bawling, unusual for her, nearly broke my heart. She wanted to know "Why?" the young man did this or that—as if that knowledge would provide a solution. She asked us what to do—my wife and I became again the pillars of the community—and we counseled figuring out and understanding both him and herself. There was no simple course of action to recommend. After all, what can you do? I wanted to send the young man a dead fish wrapped in a newspaper, but knew I couldn't keep that promise. Her younger sister cried with her. Her grandmother said, "Good riddance!" (Experience has taught her to judge quickly.) I wanted to urge my daughter to toughen up, but admired her openness, too. Her mother and I criticized the boy vigorously, hoping to restore her energy, but she did not want to see faults in him. All she yearned for was for him to call, for everything to return to the good old days. We were a seasoned—or callous—couple; we almost forgot our experience of such raw need and grief. My daughter looked as though she could gobble up the young man whole. It is easy to say, "He'll come back, it's just a phase," or "It's better to have it out now, rather than later." Such wisdom is no comfort at all to a person who has lost a part of herself. I was sorry that I could do so little.

Then as the days and weeks wore on, she told us more about the relationship, a side we had not seen. Several years ago his mother was depressed and demanded that he stay home from college. Throughout their dating, he told my daughter she was selfish, wanted too much, and was unreasonable, which she fully accepted. He, on the other hand, was generous and reasonable—at least, that was the way they looked at it then. His sanctimonious tone began to cloy, for me. Because she was morally "inferior," he often got his way in their plans, and she did not question or express anger about this definition of roles. It was natural then, and she had only begun to wonder about it recently.

I could hardly believe that my daughter—she who was so confident and accomplished—had been duped by such a line, and I began to picture the previously agreeable suitor as a plotter and deceiver. The picture of the ideal couple was tarnished, as it was bound to be at some time.

The crackup showed us how little we knew about my daughter and her boyfriend. I wondered: Were my wife and I such fools for love, doting parents who smiled on any match, that we encouraged our daughter to wear rose-colored glasses? Would I be so angry at him, if I did not need him to take care of her?

My twenty-year-old son said: "It's simple. He wanted his freedom, and he took it."

I recalled that back in my dating days, I too thought I knew how to finish a relationship by cutting off cleanly. Now I saw the matter differently, through the hopes of the woman. It was mostly a case of my not knowing how to care for the girl, being too scared for myself. I left them lightly, but carried along a secret sense of grief and failure.

WILLIAM HOUGHTON, M.D., *lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*

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Our social roles shape us in powerful ways. A man is supposedly strong and independent. If a woman tries to tie him down, he rides off into the sunset. A woman supposedly craves security, derives her self-esteem from a man's approval, and will sacrifice her interests to get it. By biology and culture, a young woman in her relations tends to be adhesive, sticky. A young man is gritty, unattached, free. My daughter and son pretty much follow these stereotypes. Where did they get them? From us? Not deliberately. They must have come from peers, or crummy TV, or unwittingly from us. Both my daughter and my son were right, in a way. I only wished that each could borrow a bit from the other.

As my anger toward the young man cooled, and my large but finite quotient of compassion for my daughter dwindled, I realized that most of the relations between men and women are far from perfect, and sometimes cannot be readily fixed. From the far side of the generation gap, the realization that I have been married to the same woman for over twenty-five years nearly blows my mind. My wife and I are no angels, no perfect match. Our love and hate are interwoven. I have yearned to be disloyal to her, to break loose, particularly when I saw at times that she had no sympathy for something I cherished—I'm sure that she has felt the same way toward me, too—but my sense of commitment has always reined me in. I doubt that there are any relations in which this bedrock of self-interest is not reached, sooner or later. I gradually renounced a few of my wishes, a bit of my freedom, and was amazed at the benefits I received in return. I came to love her quirks, her differences from me. The stubbornness in her, that sets my teeth on edge, works in my favor, too. Love is the fruit of marriage, not the cause. My surprising, sticky commitment is as much a mystery to me as the faithlessness of others. The tension between the wish for freedom and the wish for closeness is always there, but for me the marriage knot is easy and snug, with just enough room for play.

Older than our modern interest in the feelings of each person is the classical tradition of hard facts and the virtue of bearing up. What my daughter and the young man were encountering was the test we all face: Can you make it on your own, accept your essential aloneness, or do you always seek the tantalizing dream of someone to protect you from loneliness? The wish for merging is briefly satisfied and always frustrated in the end. Friends, relatives, mates—all leave us alone at times. They die, or go away, or more often simply don't understand us. Even marriage is no remedy. "If you fear loneliness, don't marry" (Chekhov). The best of men and women have a limit on their capacity to love, some less than others. "If you have one true friend, you have more than your share" (Thomas Fuller). "Life is a warfare and a stranger's sojourn" (Marcus Aurelius). We all die alone. We all *live* alone. (Monday mornings are the worst for me.) One of my favorite lines is the title of B.B. King's blues song: "Nobody loves me but my mama, and she could be jiving me too." The phrase from the Beatles is softer, but hard enough: "What do you see when you turn off the lights? I can't tell you but I know it's mine." These are not romantic thoughts, not optimistic for love. These stoical sayings are hard words when my daughter is wishing for love, but they sum up an experience not to shrink from or be ashamed of. Like most people, I breathe easier after a breath of this invigorating fresh air. I'd like to spare my daughter, but I doubt that life will. I'd like to warn her off too much Romance, but not scare her off completely.

As the seasoned psychiatrist, Dr. Elvin Semrad, told a class of students: "In everyday life, each of you to the extent of your maturity lives alone. You make your own decisions, which is lonesome. You feed yourself and look after your own physiology. Then, periodically, by mutual agreement with someone in your life, you have some human contact. Maturity is a matter of people learning to be alone together. And the more mature you are the less you insist that the other person changes to fit your mold. It becomes a relatively minimal matter. Nothing is ever mutual. You can only be close when you are separate."

How was the story of my daughter's love completed, or at least finished? I notice I am reluctant to write a conclusion to this essay. Why do we want a happy ending, or at least a clear one, unless we want the union to continue, and the romance to triumph? Still, everything has an ending.

After a while, the image of the young man faded, and my daughter moved on. She began to invest in other relations. Sadder but wiser, she saw the ex-boyfriend as still attractive and good, but diminished. She and I recognized that part of the responsibility for the mistake in the affair was hers. "The only fuel for learning is the sadness you feel from your mistakes. It is important not to waste that fuel. Sorrow is the vitamin of growth" (Semrad). With him she was locked into a narrow one-on-one relationship, cramping herself, but outside that she was free to have a variety of friends, not as mystical, but probably more comfortable.

A system of arranged marriages would be unacceptable, would not arrive at the result we want. It would cheat my daughter of risking her neck and learning who she is. I must admit that I am tempted to resolve that all future suitors will receive a total body CAT scan and trial by combat. I doubt that I will do that, or that I can fully protect my children with troubles with romance.

My wife and I miss the young man's quiet humor, his helping out, his politeness. I recall his immobile mask of silence. But politeness goes only so far in the long run.

My daughter's face is quick and open, and transparent. That's risky, but a style I like.

After all, what can parents do but wait and watch with their children in their setting out, and coming back, and going out again, and learn about themselves, for better or worse, from these reflections? □

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BEATRICE FOREVER

MUCH ADO ABOUT EMMA

Theater critics can break your heart with their eloquence about performances that are no more. When Stark Young tells us that one of Doris Keane's was "...all music and security of outline, like a swan on water, and something we long to believe can never cease to exist," we must take his word for it because that performance *has* ceased and now lives only in Young's prose.

But Emma Thompson's Beatrice is ours forever. This definitive performance is on film.

So you don't have to take my word for it that Thompson begins the movie, *Much Ado About Nothing*, by reading the words of the song, "Sigh no more, ladies," with inflections that not only mock love but mock the mockery of love, that make us share Beatrice's double realization that love makes us fools and that love is inescapable.

And don't trust me when I say that all the following is so:

In the masquerade ball, Thompson shows us with the tiniest shift of facial expression the exact moment when Beatrice realizes that her disguised tormentor is Benedick, and that the discovery now enables her to torment him.

In her reply to Don Pedro's teasing "you have lost the heart of Signor Benedick," Thompson doesn't rattle out the words ("he lent it me awhile; and I gave him use for it," etc.) in the way most actresses do, like Vassar girls at a 1920s' mixer, but speaks as a woman who has been Benedick's lover already, been trifled with, and doesn't intend to be burned again. This emotional weighting of a passage usually passed off as banter gives the Benedick-Beatrice sparring matches a background that deepens them, embitters them.

And, in the play's most famous scene, when Benedick calls upon Beatrice to set him a task that will prove his love, Thompson's "Kill Claudio!" is limpid rage springing out of her bottomless love for her wronged cousin, Hero. It is as great a piece of acting as I ever hope to see on screen or stage.

And must you credit me when I state that the actress does all of the above without sacrificing any of the lightness, speed, or fun of her role? No! Emma Thompson's Beatrice flourishes in technicolor in a theater near you. Drop this magazine and go.

Those readers who haven't instantly obeyed me will now be punished with a lot of pro and contra concerning the rest of the movie.

Kenneth Branagh's production is handsome, brainy, purposefully bustling, securely paced, well-attuned to Shakespeare's unblinkered view of humanity. Branagh has done what any good director does with any complex play: he has seized upon the reality of the central situation. The igniting action of *Much Ado* is the return of soldiers from war, danger, enforced celibacy, and their entrance into a household full of friendly, nubile women. Branagh makes this fact so alive for us in the first ten minutes that everything else naturally flows out of it.

The setting is Shakespeare's Italianate one but relocated to a sort of streamlined version of the nineteenth century. The cavaliers crest a hill overlooking a Tuscan villa. The music—Patrick Doyle's score is irresistibly Bacchic—drowns out any shouts from the men but we can read the expressions on their faces. They are beautifully lustful. And down in the villa, the news of the army's approach has caused a frenzy. The women strip and bathe and we catch brief glimpses of their nakedness before they throw on their finery. Soon the soldiers, in another part of the estate, are also naked as they plunge into a pond and then suit up in formal attire. Once all the uniforms of peace, male and female, are on, war breaks out again, the war of love that can be waged now that mortal combat is finished.

The heat of the Italian summer never lets the heat of battle die down. Cicadas drone as young Claudio reveals his love of Hero to Don Pedro, and the sun beats down as they rehearse the tactics necessary to capture the lady. But though the maneuver goes according to plan only a few hours later, Claudio already seems to have forgotten about it and suspects his senior officer of having swiped his girl. Reading the play, one may suspect Shakespeare of nodding or we may give up on Claudio as a dolt; but in all the drowsy, droning, bemusing sunlight with which Branagh fills the screen, everything seems to proceed with logical craziness. Branagh has made *Much Ado* into *A Midsummer* Day's *Dream*, and the lovers behave as they do because they are dazzled by sunlight, exhilarated and exhausted by heat, blinded by the physical beauty of flowers and flesh, and always at least a little pixilated from being young, alive, and accepted.

For me, this is a convincing view of the play and everything Branagh does with camera, cutting, physical setting, costume, and music realizes his conception. His use of the Tuscan villa is often inventive, always appropriate: when the treacherous Don John and his cronies conspire to destroy love, they are in an underground stone room where the sunlight that so intoxicates sweethearts is sealed off. When Benedick and Beatrice, warm for each other but dismayed by the disaster that has overtaken the younger lovers, declare their hearts, it is in a chapel that is well lit but roofed against the heat.

Yet all is not well with this movie. Shakespeare's plays are supreme in their characterizations, and I am forced to note that not only no other performance in this movie matches Thompson's (that would be too much to expect) but that, of the several male roles, only two are fulfilled, Richard Briers is ripe as Leonato and, as his brother, Brian Blessed, is maturely cherubic. But the rest of the males, the young males who must give this play its fire and commotion (Beatrice giving it heart and wit), are all problematic, and the best of the lot—Branagh himself—is the most problematic of all.

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Robert Sean Leonard has the basic substance for Claudio. The fire of first love is in his eyes and he convincingly shows how such unconditional adoration can turn into equally unconditional hate. But his diction wavers and, both in speech and deportment, he brings America too insistently into this utterly European work of art.

Denzel Washington, on the other hand, is well-spoken as Don Pedro and cuts a fine figure. Yet this is a callow performance, more like a warm-up than a finished work. Don Pedro can certainly be played by a young actor but the seniority of rank and pride of command must be communicated. Washington seems detached rather than lordly.

Keanu Reeves is quite bad as Don John. He holds onto one sneering note throughout and never shows us the villain's pleasure in his own malice.

Michael Keaton apparently decided that Dogberry's troubles with the English language are rooted in fundamental problems with the human race, so he plays the constable as a comic psychotic receiving his thoughts from some alien's spaceship in the heavens. Keaton is often fascinating in his weirdness but never funny. And he and director Branagh have severely damaged the movie by allowing Dogberry to maul and gouge not only the villains that the constable captures but his own deputies. And he trots about on an imaginary horse. Dogberry can be convincingly portrayed as quietly mad but not as openly, dangerously crazy, for then why would the sane citizens of Messina accept him as a guardian of civic order?

Like Keaton's Dogberry, Kenneth Branagh's Benedick is a performance wriggling in the grip of a concept. But, unlike Keaton, Branagh finally wriggles free and delivers a human being. Branagh's Benedick is a fellow who has diminished himself by denying his feeling toward Beatrice. When he is tricked into admitting to himself his love, he becomes whole. Good approach, but I found the actor's execution of it too blatant in the play's first half. Trying to establish Benedick's foolishness, Branagh screeches, caws like a crow, does unfunny bits with collapsing chairs. This excess backfires because it keeps us from seeing Benedick's potential, the compassion and true wit that will be released once he becomes a worthy lover. After all, no matter how captious he may be toward Beatrice, Benedick is well regarded by his fellow soldiers and courtiers. After the mutual declaration of love, Branagh is splendid: ardent with his lover, sagacious in aiding the slandered family, and (how rare this is with most Benedicks!) truly menacing when he challenges Claudio.

A great Shakespeare film? No, it hasn't got a majority of successful performances. But it does have what few Shakespeare films, what few movies of *any* sort, possess: zest.

And there's always Emma Thompson, wit of the sixteenth century (courtesy of Shakespeare), sensual apparition of nineteenth-century Italy (courtesy of this production), and heroine of the 1990s. Courtesy of herself. RICHARD ALLEVA

BOOKS

Get thee to a monastery

TEMPTATIONS
Paul Wilkes
Random House, $20, 256 pp.

Paul Elie

Paul Wilkes writes about religious matters for the *Atlantic* and the *New Yorker*, and with the recent books derived from his *New Yorker* work—the surprisingly affecting *In Mysterious Ways: The Death and Life of a Parish Priest* (Random House) and then *The Education of an Archbishop* (Orbis), about Rembert Weakland—he has established himself as one of this country's most active journalists covering religious affairs. In those books, Wilkes's virtues were largely negative ones. He practiced useful arrangement rather than artistry, worked by elucidation rather than striking insight. Above all, he eschewed appeals to this or that understanding of the Christian life, appealing instead to the common sense he picked up during his Catholic childhood in the 1950s, a fondly recalled time when "the Catholic church was strong, monolithic and growing, and her best young men could think of no higher calling than the priesthood." Such common sense—as seen in the parish priest Joe Greer of *In Mysterious Ways*, and in Archbishop Weakland—is for Wilkes the highest of the virtues. Lucky for him, because the appeal to common sense is also his main journalistic tool, allowing him to muddle through vexing issues without giving undue offense to his many readers. Thus in a 1989 state-of-the-seminaries piece which his publisher deems "controversial" (divinity school officials ambushed him at a subsequent conference on journalistic ethics), Wilkes played radicals and conservatives off one another while positing no idea of just what shape a good modern seminary might take; in a recent *Times* op-ed quickie about priestly pedophiles, he proposed that the solution to this problem, and to most of the problems of the church in the U.S., is simply to ordain women and married people and so get more red-blooded '50s types back into the rectories.

All that said, Wilkes is a skillful writer, able to relate complicated subjects in

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an engaging, readable style. In *Temptations*, however, Wilkes is on his own, and the uses to which he puts his writerly gifts and his commonsensical outlook show how equivocal—and, indeed, tempting—such things can be.

The novel has to do with the monastic life, which Wilkes has explored in a television documentary about Thomas Merton. A brief prologue introduces the narrator and protagonist. Joseph, born of Eastern European Catholic immigrants, an overachiever in school, is now, in middle life, "a somewhat accomplished nonfiction writer." His genre is "the lived experience kind of book," and his main asset is "the uncanny ability to enter the mind and soul of his subject." Joseph is also, he tells us—never quite convincingly—a hedonist, promiscuous, superficial, fond of expensive gourmet goods, the brands of which are deftly dropped throughout the novel. And for all this he is "still one of that dying breed, the 'practicing Catholic'—not a good one, mind you, but practicing at it." In despair after a week in which he has slept with four different women in New York, he sets off to get his spiritual bearings—at "a Zen center, a Mennonite farm, and a charismatic evangelical house of prayer," and finally at Our Lady of New Citeaux, a Trappist monastery in Vermont.

He has been there before, on assignment, and has kept up a correspondence with the spiritual director, Father Columban. Now Joseph tells Columban that he wants to get close to the inner lives of the monks, and eventually to write a book about them. The spiritual director, in the sort of *pas de deux* that is a strong point of the book, tells him that the only way to get close to the monks is to adopt the attitude of a postulant. So he sets up Joseph in a cottagelike "hermitage" on the monastery grounds, grants him the use of a four-wheel-drive pickup truck, and urges him to read the strict and straight spiritual giant Aelred of Rivaulx. To the chagrin of his agent, Mort, a crude stereotype of a New York Jew, soon Joseph is living in a halfway house between his spiritual life and his literary one. Joseph has in mind a thoughtful time culminating in a thoughtful book. Mort has in mind a screenplay for Jeremy Irons. "I'm calling Zabar's right now. Sending up a CARE package. Nova and scallion cream cheese, bagels," Mort tells him by phone. "Send me an outline, okay? Cheesecake too. Think facial expression. Think understatement. Think lots and lots of money."

Wilkes's main business, it seems, is exploring the ways the church-world conflict is made manifest for a contemporary person, and he does so on a number of levels. There is the conflict between the abbot and the agent, between prayers and profits, as Joseph's intentions, increasingly purified as chapters named for months mark the passage of time, move away from writing and toward the notion of entering New Citeaux as a postulant. Reading, praying, and tending a private garden worthy of Smith & Hawken, Joseph gets a real taste of the contemplative life, which Wilkes renders eloquently and authentically.

More interesting is the conflict between Joseph's yearnings for a distinct experience of God and his habit of standing back and taking notes. In a series of colloquies Father Columban, abetted by unyielding quotes from Aelred, challenges Joseph from every side: when the writer declares his desire to enter into the monastic life entirely, the priest tells him to get on with his article; when Joseph despairs of making spiritual progress, Columban accuses him of wanting to be "the Rod McKuen of the Trappists. 'Listen to the warm. Listen to the heartbeat of God,'" he jests. "God, you'd sell millions! They'd love it: the new, no-pain religion. You're just right for your generation out there working out on their exercise machines, with their headphones on. Maybe that's exactly what you came here to find." More interesting still is the conflict between Joseph's commitment to sample the ascetical life and his love affair with Margery Fowler, who emerges a third of the way through the novel. Margery too is a cradle Catholic of the '50s generation, lapsed religiously but not spiritually—after a stint as the broker for a group of batik-making nuns, she runs a health-food store called Nature's Bountiful Harvest—and she shares his parochial set of references. Their delicious romance has its high point when Joseph catechetically tests Margery

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on common cultural truths:

"Gay?"

"Don't think so, but then I've never been asked to indulge."

"Don't shave under your arms?" ...

"Forgive the five o'clock shadow, but I didn't think I'd be inspected today...."

"Cats?"

"Good in their place. Buy them the cheapest cat food and never use 'Mitzi doesn't feel good today' as an excuse when you don't want to go out yourself."

"Professional sports, watching of?"

"Once, twice a year for baseball, always at the park. Eat seventeen hot dogs, drink as many beers as you can....Yell and scream for whoever's losing."

Alive, believable, appealing, Margery is the greatest temptation Joseph meets in the novel: a person who honors and shares his quest for spiritual wholeness while treading a path that demands relatively little in the way of sacrifice. One wishes that Wilkes had developed their romance more, for it lies precisely in the realm of common sense in which he has worked so profitably. Instead, lamentably, Wilkes obeys an altogether different rule of common sense—the rule that tells him he must hang his reflections on a crime-ridden movie-of-the-week plot if they are to play for a mass audience. In often bewildering fashion, this plot enfolds a sinister Brother Polycarp, a postulant who commits suicide, another who ends up in a mental hospital, a rejected novice turned militant abortionist, and the private detective Octavius Kiernan, a onetime Latinist who reviles the monastery for its embrace of Vatican II reforms. It culminates in a scene in which Kiernan, crazed and wearing the preconciliar cassock, all but burns the monastery down.

The biblical conflagration set off by David Koresh reminds us that such an incident is not unbelievable. Even so, in this novel it is flagrantly inappropriate, a betrayal of Wilkes's own sensibility and of the nuanced fictional world that he has striven to create. One might say, simply, that he chose to come down on the wrong side of the divide between prayers and profits, gerrymandering his book for the sake of commerce. Or one might say, more charitably and more instructively, that Paul Wilkes, gifted with eloquence, understanding, and common sense, falls short of the uncommon asceticism of an artist. □

MODERN GARDENING

ARCADIA
Jim Crace
Atheneum, $20, 311 pp.

Edward T. Wheeler

Jim Crace is of the same generation of British novelists as Martin Amis and Peter Ackroyd; and like them he is a chronicler of the city. Resemblances end quickly after that: where Amis (*London Fields*) is apocalyptic in theme and "postmodern" in form, Crace is generally affirmative and traditional. Unlike Ackroyd whose *English Music* seeks to tie London to the eternal English Imagination, Crace offers us a very earthy city, whose assurances are those of survival, of growth from decay. This is a carefully crafted book, one that seems as symmetrical and patterned as a globe artichoke. The prose runs continually to unmarked blank verse, so rhythmic and alive is it to incantation: "This is the sorcery of cities. We do not chase down country roads for fame or wealth or liberty. Or romance even. If we hanker for the fires and fevers of the world, we turn our backs on herds and hedgerows and seek out crowds."

The story's focus is on the end times of Victor, the vegetable king, and his attempt to leave some sort of lasting monument to his life as a wholesale produce baron. Victor's position is anomalous: he has grown great through produce, through feeding the country to the city, yet he lives in a "misanthropic building," occupying a greenhouse roof garden, plagued by aphids. This same garden was once a restaurant but now abandoned because the building's sway sickened the patrons. The occasion of his eightieth birthday has Victor ruminating on a project, a high-rise structure to be called Arcadia which will replace the open-air Soap Market. Victor wishes to transform, to idealize his roots, for it was in the Soap Market that Victor got his start as a hawker so many years before. His architect promises Victor "Outside, the city; countryside within." That same birthday, however, also sees the unexpected and bitter split with Rook, Victor's chief of staff. The action of the novel is to a large extent the tracing of Rook's schemes to be the bird of ill omen for Arcadia. The auguries he performs convey the futility of the Arcadian scheme.

At the same time, Crace asks us to be burghers and to revel in the city, mostly the smell of its bowels. The organic metaphor won't be suppressed: "our city" is alive and the hero of the novel. The antagonist is the country and the conflict one of ingestion and growth; the place at which city mouth meets country morsel is the Soap Market where produce is sold. To city and country must be added a third, the urban developer, whose architects and planners would make artificial the city's relationship with the country. The major action moves through metaphor to myth: what is vital grows and will return. Waiting also, darkly, in this novel is a shadow. The epigraph warns us that the greatest men, like the tallest buildings, make their marks by blocking out the sun. Such threat to life provokes a recollection of "Et in Arcadia Ego," words which Crace never lets Death speak outright. In the most fundamental way, this novel places at its center the struggle between life and death.

Crace's imaginative energy—at least as far as characterization is concerned—is not in the present but in the past with Victor's mother, Em, and her struggles to survive with infant Vic. Em's history, told in flashback, is Georgian and the urban world Crace constructs is brilliantly alive, almost Dickensian in its grotesques, its sharpers, and in the symbolic

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use of the conflagration which ends Em's life. The contemporary thugs, street people, professionals, and managers seem to act more as necessary adjuncts to the theme—the city's survival as organism. This leads to the technical wrinkle in the novel which is puzzling. The narrator announces himself as The Burgher, a one-time newspaper columnist who published under that by-line. But he also has impossible omniscience; his access to the histories and minds of the characters is never explained, just winked at with a phrase: "I raise my head above the parapet again." The Burgher is, however, necessary for the book's structure: The City needs a City-Dweller to offer closure. In his final monologue the retired Burgher says "yes" to life where life seems most threatened—in the slums of the city he loves. His is a rhapsody on a fruit, a pear about to spoil. The Burgher eats in celebration of the market which has sprung again from detritus, from the refuse of the sanitized Arcadia.

Crace catches so the rhythms of growth, of organic life, in the city that a reader can forget the technical problem and scent the wind: "My tongue's kept busy by the scrap of pear skin lodged between my teeth. That's all that stops me sucking in our city air, and whistling."

And this almost scans. There is menace conveyed in the description of the riot and fire which destroy the old Soap Market, much chest-tightening pain over Rook's asthmatic defeat, but the real power of the novel lies in the poetic language and not with an individualized human drama. The narration gets increasingly distant as the climactic scenes unfold: we flit about, watch, overhear, and get mashed in words: "He tossed [the grape] in his mouth. It popped between his teeth. He poked his tongue out at the children. Squashed green flesh lay in the ladle of his tongue."

Jim Crace has found a form which celebrates the cycle of life in the city. His achievement is pungent but almost too self-regarding, too easily satisfied with the smell of mortality. As he escapes from the shadow cast by the towering Arcadia and faces the shadow of his own death, The Burgher's affirmations transform the city's tragedies, gobble them up in a rush to rebirth. But this won't do. *Arcadia* simply lets us off too easily. Death, which is always "also in Arcadia," has its roots in evil, which, God knows, is real enough in all our cities today. The story of another fruit eaten in celebration of the self slips outside the coils of this narrative. But that metaphysical premise must be excluded if The Burgher is to have omniscience, for he speaks the myth by which the novelist as his own god redeems the world. The technical problem, finally, comes around to a thematic statement: we can rub shoulders with Death in Arcadia when we speak beyond our own limitations. In this City of Man the source of such speaking is left unfound. □

REVIEWERS

PAUL ELIE *is a frequent* Commonweal *contributor. His most recent review appeared in the November 6, 1992 issue.*

EDWARD T. WHEELER *is chairman of the English Department at the Williams School in New London, Connecticut.*

PAUL BAUMANN *is associate editor of* Commonweal.

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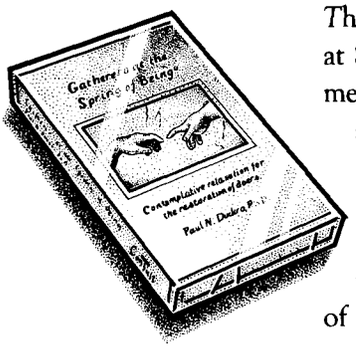

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SERMON FROM THE MOUNT

THE SUBVERSIVE FAMILY
An Alternative History of Love and Marriage
Ferdinand Mount
Free Press, $24.95, 282 pp.

Paul Baumann

Ferdinand Mount's pleasingly iconoclastic defense of domesticity and romance courts few predictable allies. He is as stinging in his condemnation of the church's meddling in family life as he is of the more straightforward rationalistic assaults on the traditional family by most Marxists and many feminists. In a mischievous but penetrating rebuke to the "carefree attitudes of the Sermon on the Mount," he presses hard on the conflict between faith's call to trust in God's earthly providence (..."Take therefore no thought for the morrow"), and the more prosaic concerns of any responsible parent to lay up treasure for the care of children. "The Sermon on the Mount is a wonderful, intoxicating sermon," Mount slyly acknowledges. "But it is a sermon for bachelors."

Mount is hard on bachelors, but there is hardly a dull page in his sermon on the mutlifarious virtues of coupling. The editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, Mount covers an enormous amount of historical territory, briskly disposing of what he judges to be erroneous assumptions about the evolution or plasticity of the family in Western culture. The nuclear, not the extended family, has always been the norm; most ordinary people have always married for love; women have enjoyed equality and authority within marriage; a caring and affectionate attitude toward children is not a modern invention; the sharing, "sensitive" contemporary father has a good many historical precedents. And so on. With typical and nearly persuasive bravado, Mount even argues that modern rates of divorce (followed, of course, by remarriage), because they reflect a devolution of authority from the state and church to individuals, is in fact further proof of the popularity and stability of traditional family arrangements, not of their decline.

Mount attributes the prevalence of "myths" about the family's changeableness to what he calls "simple-minded progressivism," the modern intellectual assumption that basic social institutions evolve from primitive to higher and more complex forms. This pervasive bias blinds us to the humanity, passion, and wisdom embodied in the traditional arrangements by which men and women have sought love and affection and in which children are best cared for. From Christianity to radical feminism, the family has been the object of concerted assaults by the enemies of individual freedom and choice, Mount contends. Its remarkable survival, he concludes, is the result of the fact that "it has a life of its own, that in some sense the family is *natural*."

The Subversive Family can border on the proselytizing, and Mount's intellectual energy rarely flags. He is most impressive, to my mind, in his defense of the family's particular and exclusive relationships against the abstract and universalizing schemes that can animate the state or the church.

Especially telling is his analysis of the dilution of human feeling inherent in the search for some sense of fraternity or solidarity outside the family. Bruno Bettelheim's elucidation of the shallowness that besets relationships on the kibbutz is put to good use here. Idealistic notions of social "brotherhood" and undifferentiated equality cannot be reconciled to the essentially private, hierarchical, and historically continuous structure of family life. "Intimacy always entails personal authority," Mount writes. "In a truly intimate relationship one person makes unique claims upon another, claims for services, affection, respect, and attention which can be supplied only by that other person....the authority is both partial and reciprocal....that the claims may be different for the two sides of the relationship, 'asymmetrical' in the modern jargon, does not alter the fact that there *are* two sides." Mount does not deny the reality or value of a broader sense of community or solidarity. But he insists we not seek the satisfactions characteristic of intimacy in the larger arena of politics or society. "If you insist on *equality, freedom, separation*, you must accept the consequences, and recognize that you have created an entirely new world which cannot be kept warm by the old love."

For all its verve and clear-eyed analysis, *The Subversive Family,* like all families, has limitations. As Christopher Lasch demonstrated in *Haven in a Heartless World*, the family cannot thrive merely as a refuge from an otherwise impersonal, competitive, and individualist culture. As every parent knows, eventually one must send one's children off into that world. There is no simply private solution to the problem of family life—the world comes home with us every day. Without a meaningful larger world to receive us, the freedom and privacy Mount rightly extols degenerates into crushing isolation.

Mount's complaint against Christianity, his facile way with a scriptural reference, is not merely an idiosyncratic grudge. The strong ascetical dimension to Christianity can easily obscure its reciprocal and equally powerful affirmations of human life, love, and affection. But incarnational religion, after all, is about the consecration of the body, not its denial. Mount's spirited attack on the church's "threat" to the family fails to come to terms with the fact that this supposedly antifamily religion is about a God born of a human mother and raised in an unexceptional little nuclear family. Similarly, if Mount attributes the longevity of the family to its unique ability to meet the human need for intimacy, to what does he attribute the longevity of Christianity? Here he seems to want to convict the church of an unparalleled record of historical oppression that, when issued as a Marxist or feminist indictment, he sensibly dismisses out of hand. Given the historical allegiance of families to the church, the hostility that Mount claims exists between these two venerable institutions is not plausible. □

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 2)

But where Hoyt's utopian optimism tends to minimize the significance of Act-Up, my anti-utopian pessimism tends to maximize it, leading me to see Act-Up as a logical consequence of the "Left McCarthyism" that informs the gay rights-movement. The weapon of choice for even the most genteel members of the movement is the accusation of homophobia. It's like mace; nonviolent personalities can use it effectively. The "homophobic" charge is akin to the "red" or "pink" charge in the days of Joe McCarthy: a way of silencing your critics by demonizing them. It is a Manichaean tactic, dividing the world into angels and devils. Does a Catholic say, "I sympathize, but I belong to a religion which has always considered homosexual conduct as sinful"? Mark him down as a homophobe. Does a Protestant say, "I sympathize, but every Bible verse I find on the subject appears to condemn homosexual conduct"? Another homophobe! Another homophobic religion! Does a nonreligious person say, "I sympathize, but I fear that homosexual marriage will cause damage to the family, the most fundamental of all social institutions"? *O tempora! O mores*! Is there no end to these homophobic bigots? Once the movement discovered it could get away with attacking its enemies, including the most reasonable, as homophobic, it was only a matter of time before Act-Up would emerge.

One significant difference between the early '50s and now is that in the old days America's liberals knew that it was wrong to demonize your enemy, and said so. Nor did they confine their condemnation to demonizers from the Right; they also condemned those of the Left, namely, Communists and fellow travelers (the true reds and pinks) who dismissed all critics as lackeys of the capitalist class. Nowadays, by contrast, most people who have appropriated the title "liberal" for themselves don't seem to be bothered by the demonization tactic as long as it comes from the correct end of the political spectrum. What it boils down to is that the American cultural elite is saying to the great unwashed: "Look here; we decide what beliefs and values will prevail in this country, not you. And if you get uppity with us, we know how to put you back in your place."

Back to the parable of the wheat and the tares. The gay-rights movement, like all movements, has its good side and its bad. If I have emphasized the bad, it's because that's the side too little stressed nowadays. But I fully recognize that it has its good side. Though it has not yet attained its goal of respect for gays and lesbians because of their sexuality, it has at least won nearly universal respect for them despite their sexuality. In other words, it has won tolerance. This is a great victory—as much of a victory, I would argue, as can reasonably be asked for. If I were commander-in-chief of the gay rights movement (an unlikely eventuality, I realize), I would declare victory and go home.

DAVID R. CARLIN, JR.

CORRECTION Because of an editing error, the meaning of a passage in a letter from Max Couchman [Correspondence, May 21] was altered, not to say mangled.

Responding to an April 9 column by David R. Carlin, Jr. arguing that the two-parent family is a normative social institution that would be weakened by the legitimation of alternatives, Mr. Couchman wrote:

"Let me go out on the limb a little further and suggest that gays would gladly accept any reduction of social perks which Mr. Carlin would impose on a 'child-free' heterosexual marriage. Tell me, David, would this be carrying fair play too far?"

Mr. Couchman's point was lost when the word "homosexual" was substituted for "heterosexual." We regret the error.

A problem of tone

Niantic, Conn.

To the Editors: Enclosed is my last-minute renewal, sent with misgivings because of my disappointment with the tone of some editorials and some columns, particularly those written by David R. Carlin, Jr. He attributes extreme views to those with whom he disagrees—for example, homosexuals and those favoring women clergy. When confronted by a letter-writer, he backs down and explains away his mischaracterization of large groups. Disagreement and disagreeable views have always made *Commonweal* exciting, but the claims and arguments have always been fair.

Forty years as a subscriber is a lot of momentum, I guess, so I'll hang in for another year and hope for the best.

ROBERT W. MARRION

Getting students started

Oak Park, Ill.

To the Editors: Kenneth L. Woodward ["Catholic Higher Education: What Happened?" April 9] answers his own criticism of Catholic colleges in admitting that his intellectualism did not develop in his undergraduate days at Notre Dame but on the graduate level at several other universities. An undergraduate education will at best plant the seeds which may motivate a serious student to pursue a higher level of learning, as Woodward surely learned from Frank O'Malley, in a more mature setting than discussions of the Bookmen and Wranglers.

As to peace and justice, if Woodward

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doesn't think that's a big deal, he's missed something fundamental. I am proud and happy that my children have learned at Saint Mary's College and Marquette University the value of volunteering their time to teach deprived adults to read and write in order to pass a GED exam and qualify for employment. This is what Catholic colleges are teaching, Rembert Weakland rather than Sören Kierkegaard, and it is the American Catholic tradition. If a student feels the need to read Kierkegaard later on, his books will always be available on a library shelf.

JOSEPH A. NORTON

Rescuing our heritage

Cranford, N.J.

To the Editors: Raymond Schroth, S.J., tells us [Correspondence, April 9] that David R. Carlin, Jr. [February 12] stopped short of where we need to go in finding or restoring what is Catholic in our Catholic institutions of higher education. It is not enough to point to the problem; we are challenged "to adapt to the new era we find ourselves in and remain vital at the same time."

In the same April 9 issue, Kenneth Woodward's marvelous "Catholic Education: What Happened?" anticipates Schroth's challenge with telling insights into where we have gone wrong, and several wonderful suggestions on how Catholic education might begin to focus its intellectual energies and, one hopes, its resources, in the quest to "adapt and remain vital." Not the least of his suggestions is that Catholic colleges and universities offer courses that focus on the Catholic/Christian body of literature, which ranks among the great intellectual achievements of Western culture. Intellectually and spiritually sound course offerings speak to the heart of Father Schroth's challenge.

As a product of Catholic education through my undergraduate years, with a master's and a doctorate from leading secular institutions, and today as a professor of history at a community college, I dearly prize the Catholic roots and substance of the teaching I do. And so do my students. A not untypical comment:

"...The only courses I have taken here were pretty basic; in this class I caught the bug. Before I knew what hit me I was reading a travel book by Mark Twain, writing a poem about 'Yertle the Turtle,' contemplating cave art, Gothic art, and New York City 'street' art, listening to the genius of Paul Robeson, Izzy Stone, and the 2,000-year-old man, and seeing history in the world around me. Hardly a day goes by where I don't read or hear something that I can connect to Dr. Hogan's class in particular, or history in general."

Another area besides course offerings where Catholic higher education can "adapt and remain vital" is suggested by Patrick Kelly's excellent article on "Schools Worthy of Kids" in that same issue. It prompted me, as I suspect it did many other readers, to write a check in support of Saint Angela's efforts.

But Band-Aid checks will not cut it. The programmatic, operational, and intellectual problems facing all the Saint Angelas of our Catholic world—whether in inner cities, affluent suburbs, or rural areas—call for thoughtful consideration, debate, and a program of action—and their needs should be seen by our colleges and universities as a challenge, for we are talking about a crisis confronting the feeder schools on which a good part of the college admission structure still depends.

A year or so ago I initiated an exchange of letters with Fathers Edward A. Malloy and Theodore M. Hesburgh of Notre Dame, and with Father Aloysius Kelly of Fairfield University on the need for the Catholic higher education community to find ways to promote Catholic high school and grammar school education. I received politely supportive responses; but, thinking now in Raymond Schroth's terms, their replies strike me as full of images of "death and fire," rather than of a spirit facing the reality of crisis and determined both to adapt to our new era and remain vital.

God knows the need is present. So too, I believe, are the resources necessary to find ways of remaining true to the Catholic ideal of education that we inherited in such enriching ways from our parents' generation, an ideal that in the fullness of its history stands among the great intellectual, cultural, and spiritual achievements of the West.

LAWRENCE D. HOGAN

The writer is professor of history at Union County College in New Jersey.

Woodward's blind spot

Steubenville, Ohio

To the Editors: Kenneth Woodward's analysis in his "Catholic Higher Education: What Happened?" is quite penetrating and, for the most part, accurate, yet it is marred by what appears to be a glaring blind spot. He takes an utterly gratuitious (and inaccurate) slap at Franciscan University of Steubenville. It is not the first time he has done so in print, offering sweeping generalizations about the institution without ever having paid it a visit—although, I'm told, he has been invited.

The chief irony of this is that the prescription Woodward offers for Catholic higher education is already being followed at Franciscan University. As one who has, in contrast with Woodward, spent the last ten years of my life on Catholic campuses, I can vouch for the truth of his laments about the state of Catholic education. They are most applicable to the large, well-known Catholic university where I earned my B.A. in theology. This institution (especially its theology and chaplaincy departments) is ruled over by those who interpret the legitimate development of doctrine to mean its overthrow; Catholic culture, belief, and practice, along with the sincere piety of orthodox students, are routinely mocked.

The past three years, however, I have spent getting an M.A. in theology at Franciscan University. Woodward asks, "I wonder how many Catholic universities offer [courses in Catholic literature] to their students?"—this after smugly dismissing Franciscan University, where, as it happens, those courses are taught, where Christopher Dawson, Walker Percy, Flannery O'Connor, Cardinal Newman, *et al.* are read and enthusiastically discussed, and where it is understood that faith—and, yes, obedience and submission to legitimate authority—are not incompatible with the life of the intellect. Our greatest apologists—e.g., Newman, G.K. Chesterton—show that they are, in fact, essential to that life. Yet, Woodward is unable, or unwilling, to see this in actual practice as it is in Steubenville. Perhaps Franciscan University is not politically or religiously "correct" enough for Mr. Woodward.

JOHN MALLON

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The author replies:

Let's see, I've mentioned Franciscan University at Steubenville twice in my life and both times the university's public relations officer has invited me to come look for myself. In my business I get y'all-come-on-down invites all the time. But I get to know campuses by participating in academic events there; my beat, after all, is not education. Franciscan University has never issued me such an invite, which is to say I've never really been invited at all. Nor would I be, I suppose, given what the university regards as orthodoxy.

That some Catholic colleges and universities are lax in passing on the tradition does not mean that Steubenville is on the right track. First, its long and troubled history with the charismatic movement does not portend at-homeness with the wider Catholic tradition which I cherish. Second, the university's effort to position itself in the supermarket of higher education as a place where obedience to the (capitalized) Magisterium governs all gives further pause. I have no trouble heeding said magisterium since I know its limits as well as its necessity, and I am not scandalized when, on occasion, it gets things wrong. I don't suppose the Magisterium is ever wrong at Steubenville.

My remarks focused on the experience of undergraduate Catholic education. For such an education, it is necessary but not sufficient to teach the Christian classics. Context matters greatly. A hothouse religious environment is not the best context for nurturing a Catholic intellectual tradition, though for some kinds of students and professors it may be safe. One of my biggest gripes as a parent, however, is the number of Catholic colleges which pass themselves off as universities. Nothing Steubenville says about itself suggests that it is other than a sequestered college campus with none of the crosswinds that buffet real universities. How do you tell the difference? By the air you breathe.

KENNETH L. WOODWARD

O'Malley lives

Trappist, Ky.

To the Editors: Kenneth Woodward's article ["Catholic Higher Education"] was right on target. I especially appreciated the example he gave of Frank O'Malley's legendary classes at Notre Dame in the forties and fifties, and how Robert Coles is now doing something very similar at Harvard in his "Literature of Christian Reflection." In listing great literary figures, Woodward omitted Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton, writers Coles lectures on and writes about. He has also directed doctoral dissertations on Day (Robert Ellsberg of Orbis Books) and Merton (Thomas Del Prete, whose thesis was later published as *Thomas Merton and the Education of the Whole Person*). Coles also gave the Merton lecture at Columbia University last year. In brief, Frank O'Malley was to Notre Dame what Merton was to the monastic life, Day to the lay apostolate, and (thank God) Coles is to the secular university.

PATRICK HART, O.C.S.O.

Ad personam review

Jackson Heights, N.Y.

To the Editors: Couldn't you have found a less spiteful person than Kenneth Woodward to review Anna Quindlen's book ["A Visit to Quindlenland," May 21]? Perhaps that's an ad hominem statement; I consider Mr. Woodward's entire review an ad feminam attack.

DORIS R. ASMUNDSSON

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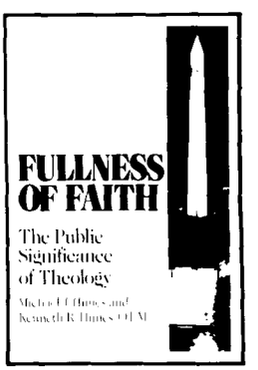

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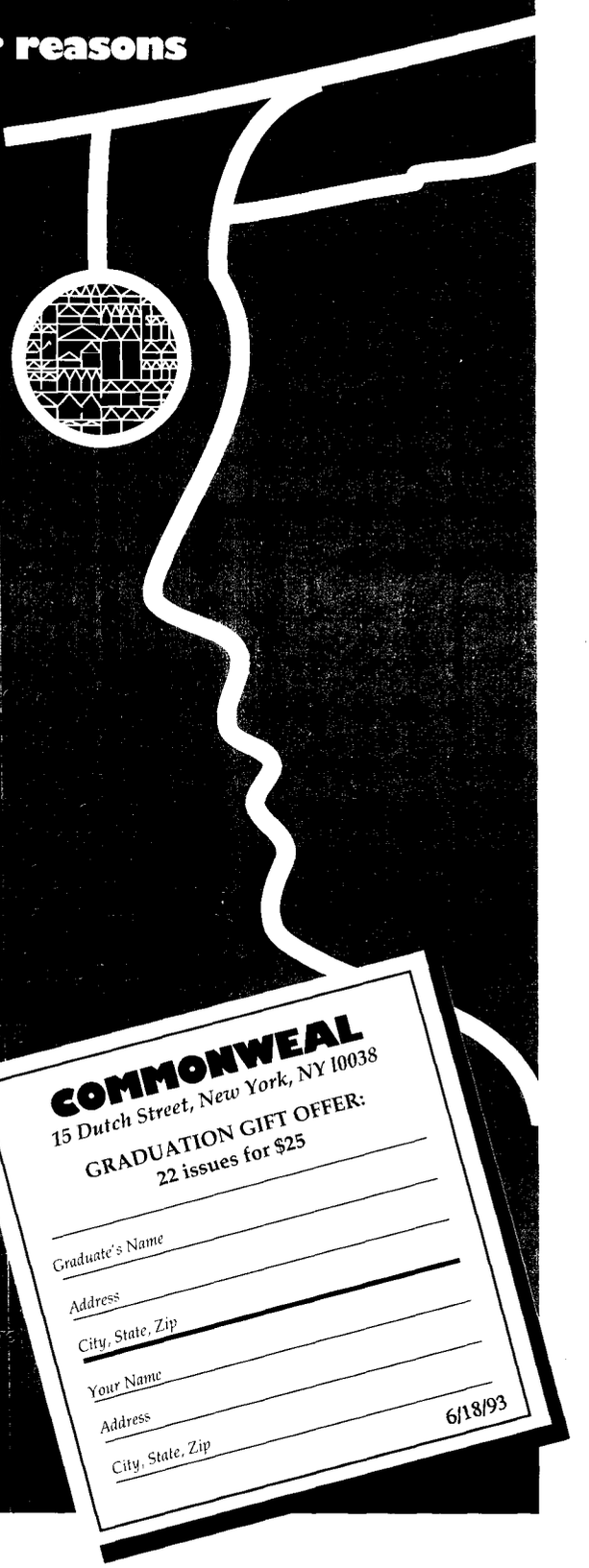

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